God's Green Country

By
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"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth."—*Ecc.12.1*
"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."—*Ps. 111.10*

God's Green Country

A NOVEL OF CANADIAN
RURAL LIFE

By
ETHEL M. CHAPMAN

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To

The Memory of a Friend

whose Vision Saw an Arcadia

for Every Field of the Green Country

and

whose Brief Years of Sympathy and Service

were Given to Make it Real for

One Spot in Rural Ontario

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GOD'S GREEN COUNTRY

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CHAPTER I.

"Do you hear the children weeping, O my brothers,
Ere the sorrow comes with years?
They are leaning their young heads against their mothers,
And that cannot stop their tears.
The young lambs are bleating in the meadows;
The young birds are chirping in their nest;
The young fawns are playing with the shadows;
The young flowers are blowing toward the West—
But the young, young children, O my brothers,
They are weeping bitterly!
They are weeping in the playtime of the others,
In the country of the free."

—Mrs. Browning.

SOMETHING was wrong—a little more than usual—at the Withers farm.

A spirit of foreboding seemed to hang in the quietness of the untravelled road past the gate, in the clamorous squeaks of the new litter of Tamworths in the barnyard, nosing sleepily into their mother's side. It seemed to come up from the swamp in the spring night's pollen-scented breath, like the air in a little close parlor after an anchor of hyacinths has been carried out on a coffin.

Billy felt the weight in the atmosphere, but he was too young to analyse it. Of all the old human emotions stirring the ten long bitter years

of his short life, fear had been the most exercised; and it was fear that troubled him now—fear of his father. Because it had been there always, he had never wondered about it. He knew that somehow, in spite of it all, he would grow up—then he would put the Swamp Farm and all he could forget about it as far away from him as possible. In the meantime, with the merciful forgetfulness of childhood, he enjoyed whatever passing pleasures came between. Just now he was down by the milk-house with little Jean, bending over her pathetic garden of four potato plants and a pansy. Billy had never had a garden for himself. It was too much like playing. Besides, as far back as he could remember he had had quite as much gardening as he wanted, taking care of the "hoed crops." It was good, though, to see Jean take the potato top affectionately in her little cupped hands, proud that she had made it grow. Billy was glad she was a girl, so she could have time for such things. Not that he minded work, of course, he soliloquized. He remembered how he had begged daily to go to help his grandfather before he died.

It was working with his father that was disagreeable. Come to think of it, it was the dread of that more than anything else that was bothering him to-night. In the morning the potato planting started. It wasn't difficult to get help just then, but for some reason of his own Dan

Withers had decided to take Billy out of school and "break him in" to farm work, just when he was getting ready to try the entrance, too, and the entrance meant such a long step towards qualifying for a job away from home!

Moreover, Billy liked to go to school. It was so different—to work where the teacher showed you how without calling you a stupid—oh, lots of names—and praised you sometimes. Remembering past experiences working with his father his heart sank. Somehow he was just beginning to wonder why, but not for years yet would he realize the injustice of being brought into the world entirely without his own willing, only to be made the prey of a chain of cruel circumstances. He couldn't even see the reason for each individual tribulation. Only his mother knew that, generally, and because she knew and anticipated for the children, hers was a twofold suffering.

Dan Withers came out to the little sagging wooden porch and lit his pipe. Judging from his physique he might have managed the tillable acres of his Swamp Farm with one hand. Also he was not the caricatured work-driven, grasping type of farmer, bent and wooden-jointed and prematurely old, as a result of his struggle to wrest a living from the elements. He had the build of an athlete without the bearing—a laziness of movement and a slouch of the shoulders

that was almost insolent, except when he walked before a crowd. He could command a military spine the instant it seemed worth the effort. When the occasion required it the hard cunning in his little brown eyes could take cover, leaving them as soft and honest as a spaniel's. The coarseness of speech that had become a habit in his own family could, with an effort, give way to a more refined vernacular, as eloquent as it was unnatural. He was not a farmer from choice; farm work irritated him. If some vocational expert could have taken him young enough, and put him on the stage, he might have developed into a master actor. As it was, his gift of address was divided among various implement agencies. The run-down farm was a hopeless sideline that supported the family.

Perhaps because Nature is always working to keep her balance and save the race, Mary Withers was made of an entirely different kind of clay. When she followed her husband out to the porch to-night it was under the strain of preparation for one of the thousand battles which, with her gentle, appealing logic, she tried to fight for her children. Her intercessions were never of any avail, but she was no strategist and she knew no other tactics. Moreover she had never been trained to fight. She had come to Dan with no experience outside the shelter of a rosemary, white-linen home, and he had taken the heart

out of her so suddenly and overwhelmingly directly after, that she was not likely to ever take any very radical initiative again.

She brought her mending to the porch with her. It was too dark to sew; but when she had to ask Dan for anything she always felt less nervous if she had something in her hands. It was hard to begin.

"The fall wheat yonder is coming on nicely," she ventured cheerfully.

He pressed the hot tobacco into his pipe a little harder than was necessary.

"Oh, yes," he conceded after some deliberation. "Things 'll come along nice enough, if a man slaves from one year's end to the other without any help, like I'm fixed."

"I thought perhaps you could get Jonas to help with the potatoes to-morrow. He isn't working."

"Oh, you did, did you? An' while you were thinkin' so active, did you think where the money was comin' from to pay Jonas? I've throwed away enough good money hirin' men. It don't ever occur to you, I suppose, thet we've a boy of our own thet's never done much to pay for his keep yet? He's got to take holt now."

"But he needs to be at school so badly, just now," she ventured timidly. "The teacher called to-day to say she felt sure he'd pass this summer if he could get to school regularly from now on."

"Well, you can tell the teacher for me, thet we ain't makin' no professor out o' Bill. When I was ten year old I was harrowin' an drivin' team, doin' a man's work. There was no school for me except what I got in the winters. Spite o' that, though, I ain't such a fool as you take me for. I can see as far into a mill stone as them that picks it, an' I ain't more'n usual blind just now. You think what's good enough fer me ain't good enough fer Bill. You don't care how hard I work so's he can get to school an' learn enough tomfoolery to get him a job thet he can clear out to, about the time he's able to be some help. But you jest ain't dealin' with the right man. You've molly-coddled that young one long enough now. To-morrow he starts his career with *me,* an' he'll maybe think he's struck fire an' brimstone before the day's over."

It wasn't a case for argument. The children were beginning to look up apprehensively, and Mary called them to come to bed. In the darkness of the kitchen when she was getting down the lamp, Billy waited to whisper: "He didn't say I could go to school, did he?"

It was hard to look into the wistful, searching face and say "No." It was harder when Billy turned away quickly and kept his face averted while he got the little tin basin to wash his feet. His mother's hard, gentle hand rested for a moment on his shoulder and dropped away dis-

couraged at the quivering of the resolute little back. Her whole body ached to take him in her arms. He really wasn't much more than a baby yet, but such expressions were denied her in the never-ending struggle to keep her emotions dammed back. Only the anxiety of love, the eagerness of service were busy in a thousand ways from the first stirrings of daylight until long after the family were asleep.

As she hung up the key of the clock Dan came in. At the entrance to the darkness of the little bedroom off the kitchen he stopped, slipping a brace over his shoulder, and looking back with a hard little glitter in his eyes inquired:

"C'n you git that fellow up to catch the horses by five o'clock? . . . . 'Cause if you can't I *kin.*"

Another of the thousand bitter details!

In the morning Mary kindled the fire and busied herself about the kitchen as long as she dared before climbing the narrow stairs to Billy's room. Then she hesitated. There was something so blue and drawn about the closed eyelids; already his hands were bent and calloused like a man's.

"An' him not much more'n a baby," she murmured. It seemed nothing short of cruel to disturb him. Perhaps he would waken himself if she just kept looking at him.

But Billy didn't waken. Once he twitched

nervously, but a boy consumed with the weakening fever of growth doesn't waken easily after working the length of a man's day, with "chores" afterwards. He had to be shaken several times before the slow, painful process began. It started somewhere in his dimmest consciousness, and gradually sent a long, slow quiver down through his healthy little muscles and back again, emerging in a gulping breath that seemed to shake his eyes open. Ordinarily he would have closed them again, but this morning the bewildering memory of something dreadful hanging over him brought him to, suddenly.

It wasn't so bad once he got up. The smarting soon left his eyes, and the stiffness began to go out of his legs. They ached, of course, from the heels up, but that was from trying to keep up to the colts on the harrow yesterday. Then his mother had a berry turnover waiting for him to start out on. She had been telling him that, he remembered, while she tried to get him awake. So he took the halters in one hand and the turnover in the other and started out for the horses in a very philosophical frame of mind, considering everything. The dew on the grass was cool to his bare feet; the robins in the bushes as he passed didn't seem to expect anyone so early, so from their reckless chattering he learned the location of many a new nest. He marked the places so he could show them to Jean. On the

hill in the pasture, where the sun was just coming up like a yellow half ball, the young cattle stood out like pieces cut out of black paper and pasted on; they looked funny when they moved. Then it was good to get up on old Nell's broad grey back, and feel the shake of the friendly muscles under him. Altogether, if some miracle could have given him a father who would occasionally see eye-to-eye with him on things agricultural and personal, Billy would almost have played hookey from school for a life like this.

The forenoon seemed to be going uneventfully enough. Dan's rather threatening admonition when they began the planting had been to "look sharp now" and not keep the horses standing, and Billy had determined to keep ahead of them at the sacrifice of any minor details. He had been shown just how far apart to drop the pieces, but when you see the furrow reaching up behind you like an unfriendly snake, and no escape before the end of the row; when the handle of the pail is cutting into the flesh of your arm and the bags of seed are rods down the field, there is a powerful temptation to make what you have go as far as possible. Suddenly the horses stopped and Dan came around to examine the planting.

"Hev you dropped 'em all as far apart as this?" he asked. "I might 'a' knowed I couldn't trust you. Never saw the time yet that you wasn't

a durn sight more bother than help. Well, you c'n just stake off these rows, an' when we're through plantin' you c'n dig 'em up with the hoe, an' plant 'em right. Mebby that 'll learn you a little more than goin' to school fer a while."

Just when the neighbors' dinner bells began to call the men from the farther fields, Dan again called across the headland: "You'd better go to the barn an' get some more seed. Save the prize Carmens here fer the last rows an' mind to shut the gate after you or the sow 'll be in."

Billy hitched old Nell to the stone-boat, shut the gate after him and went for the seed. When he came back the gate was still closed, but Tibby and her family were demolishing the last of the prize Carmens. When she found she had to leave, she made straight for the vulnerable spot in the stump fence that had given her entrance. Billy drove the pigs ahead of him and went after some rails. On the way he heard his mother ring the dinner-bell, saw, from many a furtive glance back, his father stop at the littered remains of the prize Carmens, look all around and start on to the barn. The most Billy could hope for was that his wrath might have cooled a little before he would have to meet him. By the time he had blocked the hole in the fence and brought Nell up to the stable his father had gone to the house, so he climbed up and put down the hay, dampened old Nell's oats as usual, so she wouldn't

choke on them, and with his little heart palpitating till he could hardly swallow, approached the house.

The savory steam of stewed chicken came out from the kitchen. When the meat supply ran low in the spring his mother killed off the old hens. She always made hot biscuits to break into the gravy and had the grandest pot pies ever to tide a fellow over a time like this. If they had it for dinner when he was at school she saved a drumstick and the gizzard for him. He was almost forgetting his soul's anxiety in the urgent pressure of his animal wants.

Mary knew something of what had happened. In fact Dan had informed her without softening the details. Still, in spite of the morning's "aggrevations," he was eating his dinner with satisfactory relish when Billy came in. She met Billy at the door to ask cheerfully:

"How'd you get along?"

"Fine," Billy answered with a disconcerting unsteadiness under the attempt.

"Well, just get washed now, and have your dinner while it's hot. I have some nice pot pie here."

But this was a little too much for Dan. To be ignored so brazenly in the face of the storm he had been brewing with inward satisfaction, to be treated as though he were no more than a figurehead in his own house! He had often de-

clared that there was a secret understanding, a conspiracy against him in his own family, and it was time to show where he stood now.

"You hain't got no pot-pie fer him," he interrupted. "He'll git his belly full o' something else 'sides pie when I'm through here."

All at once Billy's fortitude gave way. Perhaps because he was tired and hungry, his flesh quailed before the coming ordeal. "I didn't leave the gate open," he cried, wild terror in his eyes. "The pigs got in through the fence. I found the place."

"You consarned little liar! You fool away the whole morning, spoil the whole patch with yer lazy tricks, thinkin' I wouldn't see 'em, then let the stock in to eat up the seed I've paid fer. I'll just waken you up so's I'll warrant you'll think twice before you try the like again."

The rawhide was coming down from its hook; it had been kept in the house ever since Billy could remember.

"Now, Dan," Mary pleaded with her hand on his arm—a gentleness of touch that always irritated him into a frenzy, "you aren't fit to punish him now . . . and he did his best."

"You dictatin' too, hey!" he stormed, pushing her off. "No wonder the young un's no good with your eternal coddlin' an' interferin'. Stand out the way there."

But the mother-tigress instinct was roused in

its helpless way. Still she clung to his arm. Only Billy seemed to have come to any self-control.

"Don't, mummy," he ordered calmly; "I c'n stand it."

The nerve, the audacity of the proud little figure angered Dan more because it shamed him. If the boy had been a foot taller his father would have been cowed by the quiet reproach in the steady brown eyes, but Billy was only such a little handful of bones—something like a bird when you cover it with your hand and find it all feathers and skeleton and crushable, so he suffered the full punishment—the sickening, lithe, cutting, kind of blows that we have shivered to hear dealt to colts out in the far recesses of the green country, away from the danger of official interference. He emerged ridged, welted, white and tearless, with an ugly red streak across one cheek that somehow Dan wished wasn't there. It made the rest of his face look so white and pinched and old for its years.

Potato planting had been suspended for the day. Without excuse or errand Dan had driven off to town. Straggling buggies began driving down the road—people, neighbors most of them, all dressed up like they went to church on Sundays, the sun shining pleasantly on the horses' sleek backs and glittering over the bright parts of the harness. Billy climbed up to the vantage point of the gate post, and looked up the road

eagerly, as many another boy has watched for a circus parade. Yes, it was coming just over the hill—he could see the bright black top of it—the hearse. He remembered that this was the day of Mrs. Brown's funeral, and he had heard his mother say she ought to go; maybe he could go with her.

He had been at old Mr. Hopkin's funeral when he was quite small and had enjoyed it immensely. It had seemed just like a story to watch the people all moving around so still as if they expected something; to see the black box with its silver handles and the flowers all piled on top—he had wanted his mother to lift him up to see in, but she didn't. Mr. Hopkins' family were all there, fine, rich-looking men and women with their hair beginning to turn grey and children of their own almost grown up. And the people had snug "The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want." It was just fine. You could almost see old Mr. Hopkins going down the green pastures with his long staff, just like he came out to salt the sheep, only not so bent over, and maybe with a long gown on like the charts showed at Sunday school. He would likely have found Mrs. Hopkins, who had died two years before, and they would sit under the trees and both be happier than they had been in all their lives. One of the daughters had said, "He never was the same since Ma died," and Billy's faith never ques-

tioned the goodness of the angels in taking him to her. Altogether there was nothing sad about it, except that everyone would miss old Mr. Hopkins for a while.

But this funeral to-day would be different. There were children at Brown's—some of them just babies. Mrs. Brown couldn't be much older than his mother. People said she had consumption, and when Billy had called to ask hands to the threshing last fall he had seen her at the pump, and she looked so white and thin she had almost frightened him. When he asked if he could carry the water for her she couldn't answer —just leaned on the pump and coughed and coughed. He had seen her helping her husband plant potatoes once too. She hadn't looked so bad then, but that was a year ago. Well, she would be through now. He had heard his grandmother say once that there were "a thousand things worse than death." Maybe it was true. He climbed stiffly down from the gate post and walked reflectively to the house.

Long before the hour, the Brown house was filled with people; others gathered in little knots about the yard. Men exchanged views of the crop prospects, and occasionally when the drone of the bees in the lilacs and the creak of the buggies in the lane ceased for a moment, a remark like "That sod field ought to go fifty bushel to the acre," sounded irrelevantly across the

yard. The women talked only of the deceased—when she had taken the turn, how she had said good-bye to the children the last night and sent them off to bed with a smile, then gone completely out of her mind in the bitterness of it—and how hard it was going to be for Jim. He was just getting ready to build a barn too; a pile of gravel a few yards from the back door was evidence of its progress—it seemed hard, just when they were getting along so well. And he had done all for her that a man could do. He had even had her to the sanitarium; but it was no use—once you got consumption there was just one thing to wait for. They reviewed the lives and deaths of her ancestors to see where she had inherited it, but could find no trace of the trouble for three generations back. She had always been so smart and strong, too. Why, when she was first married she could do as much as any other two women in the neighborhood.

The old doctor, friend and terror of the community, stopped to shake hands with a strong, honest-looking young fellow leaning against the fence.

"Pretty hard, eh?" he remarked nodding towards the house.

"Sure is. It's a bad thing to let get hold of you. I know from experience. I worked in the city for a couple of years in a wholesale house once. Got a notion I didn't like farming, you

know, like lots of other young fellows do—and I believe if I'd stayed there a year longer, cooped up in a cage breathing the dust and smoke of the place, I'd never got back at all. But I got out of it in time. I'm out in the field now ten hours a day. I eat like a horse and I'll bet you couldn't find a spot on my lungs with the point of a needle. I'm always glad I was able to bring Hazel out to the farm. She gets tired of it sometimes, after always being in a store, but I tell her it's the healthiest place this side of Switzerland —all the fresh air there is clean off the fields, and the best place in the world to bring up children."

"Isn't turning out very well for these kids here."

"Losing their mother?—No."

"There's always that chance."

"There is anywhere. What do you mean?"

"Just that nine women out of ten in these parts don't have time to bring up their children; that if they were given half the care you give the milk critters the young ones would have a better chance to start with. The air may be good enough in the fields, but it's no elixir after it's been shut up all day in a house so badly heated that you have to keep the windows down tight to keep things from freezing. Did you ever see where they slept in there? A little room off the kitchen just big enough for a bed and the window

frozen down from summer to summer. I told Brown the danger, but he reckoned he got enough fresh air out doors all day, and if his wife had a cough it was no place for her in a draught. Besides, he said, she was prowling around so late at night sewing for the kids that the little time she was in bed didn't matter much. Now he's afraid he's caught it from her, but he hasn't. He's in too healthy a shape to catch anything. It's different with a woman, spent with the children coming and the long hours and the work that you couldn't hire a girl to do. I'm not so sure of the children being safe; they're none too strong to start with."

The young man resented this.

"Ain't you pretty hard on Brown?" he demanded. "You won't find a harder workin' or a kinder man to his family anywhere; nor a woman more contented or that took more pride in her home than she did. I don't like to hear him talked about as if he was to blame for this. Nor she wouldn't."

The doctor's eyes wandered up to the window with its patched, starched curtains, and row of tomato cans holding weary-looking geraniums. There were new coverings of wall-paper around the tins—a pitiful reminder of a woman's struggle to keep her house to the last.

"No, she wouldn't," he agreed quietly. "She thought the sun rose and set on Jim and the

kids. . . . And I'm not blaming him. He thought this driving and saving now was going to make things easier later on, and he just got the habit and couldn't stop. What you all need around here is a little more physiological common sense. How's Hazel?"

The question seemed ill-timed.

"First rate," the husband answered. "She's over there."

The doctor looked over to the girl who a year ago had left the smoke of the town for the haven of the green country. The plume in her chiffon hat sagged a little; her wedding dress hung a bit limp, her face seemed noticeably pale through the tan. Altogether, to his professional eye, she didn't look as well as when she left the town.

In the house the service was beginning. Through the open door in the strained quiet of the drowsy afternoon, the voice of the minister came steadily in the melancholy cadence of the old text:

"Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not."

In his dumb, helpless way the father tried to comfort the oldest little girl, the only one of the children who could know anything of the meaning of their loss. He was no callous materialist. He was suffering the full agony of his first great

sorrow and he couldn't see why it had been sent to him.

At the gate the doctor gripped the minister's hand warmly. "That was a fine sermon," he said. "Never heard better for a time like this. Ye didn't talk as though you were glad of the chance to warn us of the agony of hell. 'Man is of few days and full of trouble.' . . . It's a great text. Now some day," the doctor was neither amused or irreverent, "some Sunday, can't you preach from it again, and tell 'em how to stretch the time out and make it happier? I could give you some facts. Bless your heart, man, it would be the most opportune sermon you ever preached in your life. If you were in a city church you'd be fighting sweat shops and child labor. You've got them here, just a little more hidden from the public."

When it was all over, Billy trudged off up the road after his mother, trudged because he was stiff and sore from the day's experiences, also because his feet hurt. His Sunday shoes had been too big for him once, but they pinched his feet terribly since he started to go barefoot. They were hard, sturdy, unyielding little cases. Billy hated to go to Sunday school on account of them —but he always took them off on his way home. He asked his mother if he could now, but she paid no attention. She was walking very fast, looking straight ahead of her. At last he caught her

skirt and she stopped quickly, bent down and put her arms tight around him, drawing in her breath in sharp little gasps. He was afraid she was going to cry. He had never seen her cry, and it frightened him.

"What's the matter?" he asked, drawing away.

"Nothing. Just take them off, sonny, and how'd you like to go across the fields now and bring the cows? I'm a little anxious about Dolly."

CHAPTER II.

"A billion elements go into the making of a boy, but there is one fundamental agent of his greatness or commonness—his mother."—Will Levington Comfort.

Fears for Dolly were not ungrounded. Following the instinct of her kind, the aristocratic little Jersey had slipped away by herself on this particular afternoon. Billy found the rest of the cows waiting at the bars, lowing to be milked after a day on the heavy spring pasture. It was only necessary to let them into the lane and they started off home in a bobbing file. To find the missing cow was another proposition.

Billy knew the magnitude of the task, and planned his course with the ingenuity of a general. He would climb the hill first and inspect the cedar thickets; then he would come down through the gully where the rocks and thorns and hazel bushes made strange hiding places. If she wasn't there he would have to inspect the fence into the neighbor's woods. The pasture was rough and thickety, but he knew every foot of the ground—he had covered it on similar occasions before, and if he suffered some anxiety as to whether he could locate the cow

before dark, there was also a pleasant little thrill of adventure in the undertaking.

But Dolly wasn't among the cedars, and she hadn't found a shelter in the valley. The shadows were creeping out long and misty when Billy, with an unsteady feeling under his belt, turned his scrutiny to the line fence. Sure enough, there was a spot where the dead bush topping the ridge of piled up stones was trampled and broken. The high-strung little heifer had taken a dangerous climb to find a sanctuary worthy of her great moment. Beyond the break in the fence there wasn't a clue to the direction she had taken—nothing but solid, damp woods, and it was getting dark. Then over the fields came two slow, familiar calls from the dinner bell. A warm flood of relief came over Billy; his mother was telling him to come home—maybe his father had come back and would hunt the cow.

Dan hadn't come home yet. He was just driving into the yard when Billy came up. Besides, he had spent the afternoon in a rather noisy hang-out in town and was in no humor for hunting stray cattle.

"Chores all done?" he asked in the edged voice that the family had learned to listen for. Billy had never thought of chores. He remembered them now with a feeling of guilt. At the same time his quick senses observed the quietness of the pigs in the pen, the horses crunching their

hay in the stable. "Seems as if mother's done them," he replied. "I went from the funeral to get the cows. Dolly's missing."

"You mean to say you went off all afternoon when you knew that heifer needed watchin'? And you haven't found her yet? Well, just git right back and stay till you do find her. Never mind about your mother callin' you. You ain't dealin' with your mother now. What I'm telling' you is not to show yourself back here till you find that cow, if it takes you till daylight."

If the task of finding a hiding cow in the woods at night had seemed impossible before, it was the last thing Billy hoped for now, as he stumbled rapidly back over the humpy path through the stubble field, blinding, angry tears burning his eyes and a child's bitter vengeance surging up inside of him and finding an outlet in strange, mad little curses. At the edge of the woods the feeling began to cool in a new sensation. Billy wouldn't have admitted what it was, but the place was so still and dark and far away from everywhere, that the breaking of a dry twig under his feet set his pulses beating wildly. There were weird stories afloat in the neighborhood that the wood was a dark haunt of tramps, and ever since old Enoch, the half-witted brother of a neighbor, had wandered off and gotten lost in the heart of it and only his pitiful crying had brought the men with their lanterns, school chil-

dren had avoided it as the abode of all things lunatic and uncanny.

But Billy couldn't avoid it now. With hands clenched and legs stiffened and cold he began his lone patrol, rustling the dead leaves as little as possible and stopping to listen every few seconds, as he groped deeper into the blackness. Once he called "Dolly," but the hoarse, strained voice came whispering back from behind a hundred tree trunks. He didn't move till they had finished. Once he stumbled against a rotten log, and a cat leaped almost from under his feet and shot in long lopes off into the bracken. Instinctively Billy broke off a dead limb—he had heard of ugly encounters with bush cats in the hungry season, and the consciousness that his presence of mind hadn't entirely left him brought new courage. For the first time since he entered the wood he really remembered what he was there for. The blood began to circulate in his shaking limbs, and he found himself peering into the blackness and listening—not for "sounds" this time, but for Dolly.

Years after, in a wood in Flanders, on a night mercifully blacker than this, moving like a shadow among the willows, keeping his eyes raised from the pitiful staring eyes on the ground around him, and calling softly in a voice scarcely above the warm, scented wind off the field, his memory played him a strange trick. A

shutter in his brain seemed to click, revealing for an instant an old picture, as though this experience had happened to him before somewhere. Was the thing "getting" him as he had seen it get others? With a new terror in his drawn face he put his hand to his head and whispered, "Oh, God, not that!" Then over his bleared consciousness came a tinkling like a little bell, and a voice, clear, sweet and confident: "Billy, boy, it's all right. I'm here." And the tears came with a flood of relief and comfort, just as they had done years before when he stood in the woods of the old swamp farm, hearing her call and the tinkling of her milk pail. She had come to help him.

So are the hardest experiences made bearable by such a love, and the bitterest tragedies averted even through its memory.

It was a strong, free "Whoo-oo," that the boy sent ringing through the woods now. It started a dozen little creatures scuttling back to their holes—and right beside him a crackling of dead underbrush, the sound of a short, quick trot, a low bellow either of fear or warning, then not five yards away from him, with lowered head and eyes blazing in the darkness stood the Jersey heifer.

Billy knew that for the moment the gentle, domesticated little beast was as dangerous as any of the wild cattle of the plains. A few minutes before he would have been paralyzed at

the vague shape in the darkness with its blazing eyes and low, threatening guttural sounds. Now, with the confidence inspired by his mother's nearness, came a self mastery and a happy feeling of competence. He advanced steadily, ready to dart behind a tree if the cow showed any real sign of attack, calmly enough repeating, "Steady, Dolly; so, Boss." Evidently the cow recognized and trusted him; he had petted her all her life; also he was not coming near her calf. She had hidden it in a spot quite safe from intrusion. Sure of that she was not averse to being friendly. There was nothing to do but to try to make her comfortable where she was for the night; that was why his mother had brought the milk-pail. With a knowledge acquired of experience she learned that the calf had fed itself; that meant that it was all right. Glowing like prospectors who have found a yellow vein and marked the place, they made their way out of the wood.

Down in the hollow a light twinkled in the kitchen window; it was nearly midnight and Billy found himself stumbling over the rough pasture field half asleep and decidedly out of temper.

"My, but I hate this place," he stormed bitterly. "Soon's I'm big enough to get away it won't see much more of me, I can tell you."

His mother was silent. She never used the evasive "You must not say such things." Perhaps

the most eloquent part of her life was its quietness. Just now Billy felt his conscience twinge under it. Her patience was teaching him early to overcome the selfishness of youth. He knew that always hers was the greater suffering, but she never complained; so a bit sheepishly he added: "And I suppose that's just when I might be able to save you and Jean some. But I could make lots of money then; we'd be independent; we could all go together."

"Oh, no, sonny, we couldn't do that. Things will be different. There'll be a way for you and Jean. We'll find one somehow. Maybe your father'll see things differently after a while. I think that'll be a fine calf of Dolly's; likely almost a cream coat with black points and big soft, black eyes, like a young deer's."

"I think she was a fool to trail it away in there as if she thought we'd kill it. I'd have been gooder'n gold to it at home. It was just a chance that we found her at all, and I'm sure no one wants to go prowlin' around the swamp at this time of the night."

Then she told him what she knew of nature's primitive laws handed down from Dolly's wild ancestors—how the wild birds protect their young from preying enemies and why the old turkey hen, tame for generations, always tried to hide her nest. She also told him of whatever beautiful things she knew to look and listen for

in the woods at night, simple, wonderful lore that her father had given her on their walks through the woods to salt the cattle on Sundays. Before Billy had finished his bread and milk and crawled into bed he had resolved to explore that wood again. He wasn't afraid of it now; it was a real outdoor theatre.

But long after he was asleep his mother lay awake on the lounge downstairs, listening to the heavy breathing in the next room and thinking. It had troubled her a good deal lately, this night thinking, always looking back and wondering just how present situations had come about. Life had sprung up around her so happily in her beautiful old home. Only to live and laugh and be happy—that was all that was expected of her, and if it didn't seem enough, if she had visions, mysterious inward stirrings of something creative crying for expression, she generally kept them to herself. At last she suggested it timidly —she wanted to go to school, she wanted to do something. She didn't know just what. How could she when she had never had a chance to see what there was to be done? But her father had laughed and petted her and said he guessed he could keep his only little girl. It was a pretty hard lookout if a man couldn't protect his one pet lamb from being buffetted about in the world, fighting for a living with men, and losing their respect and her own womanliness by working at

a man's job. And he added with unconcealed disappointment that it wasn't like her to want such a thing when she could have the protection of her father's home.

She didn't realize then, of course, how miserably inadequate such a protection might be, but the argument silenced her. She felt keenly ashamed of herself—sort of in a class with the long-spurred hen cropping up every year, a menace to the social life and economic purpose of the flock. They seemed to think she wanted to "go into the world" for the mere joy of adventure or the hope of notoriety, either of which would almost have frightened her to death. But the uncontrollable little voice inside wouldn't be quiet. It still cried out to create something, to be a part of the scheme that makes the world go round.

Then Dan came, Dan with his handsome face and buoyant, indomitable swing, a fine animal—and the time-old instinct leapt into a flame. There had never been anyone else, because there hadn't been anyone else in the neighborhood, and she had never been out of it, and this seemed just what she had been waiting for. She wasn't introspective, and she didn't stop to analyze this feeling, of course. Apart from the tumultuous sway of it there were secret visions which she would not for worlds have revealed to anyone, but which brought her the only reassurance, "This is real"—a train of little white figures to

hold close for a while, then to send out into the world to do the things she had wanted to do. They would be just like Dan, of course, but they would be guided by the spark she had kept smouldering in her dreams for them.

Now that the dream had failed it never occurred to her that she had made a mistake. Dan was still her man; she couldn't have imagined things otherwise, only she wondered what she could do, working single-handed and against odds, to give the children a chance. What if, in the fight ahead of her, she should go out as she had seen several of her neighbors go, coming up to the battle spent and tired out, trying desperately to hang on, then suddenly letting go because the overstrained vitality just snapped? Staring into the darkness she whispered over and over, "Oh, God, I can't—not yet."

CHAPTER III.

"I want to tell you how much I love you. I also want not to tell you at all, but to do something for you with my hands and feet, to make your bed, to pick lavender pine cones for you, to do something you would never know that I had done. For of the many ways of love, one of the dearest is to serve in silence, to celebrate and not be found out. Mothering is a great business on these lines."
—Dr. Richard Cabot in "What Men Live By."

Summer had passed with the anxiety and toil of harvest, and the cheering presence of numberless bird colonies, living out the romances and cares of their family history in the meadow of the Swamp Farm. The sumachs in the fence corners were turning crimson before a plan that had long been evolving in Mary's mind took definite direction. Dan had gone on a two days' trip for one of his agencies. It might be the only opportunity she would have for secrecy. Nothing had ever before driven her to such drastic measures, but never before had she had so much at stake. She felt distinctly guilty as she evaded Billy's few searching questions and looked away from the troubled appeal in Jean's brimming eyes. For the first time in their lives she was leaving them; no wonder they had misgivings. She was almost frightened herself, at this new thing that could drive her to practise such deception.

Still she set out on her six mile walk to town with grim determination, walking fast to reach the railroad track before she should meet any one she knew on the travelled highway. By the time she came to the narrow board walk at the edge of the town she was hot and tired and white with excitement. Everyone seemed to be looking at her. She supposed they all knew Dan, but then there was no reason why they should associate her with Dan. It was a long time since they had been in town together, strangely enough, on a similar errand.

That was before Jean was born, and Dan had brought her in to the lawyer's office. He had sold a town lot that her father had given her, and superficial as it might seem, it had been necessary for her to come to the lawyer's office to put her name to the deed, and sign another paper applying the proceeds against the mortgage on the Swamp Farm. It was the first time Mary had put her name to any legal document except her marriage certificate, and she wished now that she had known more about what these papers meant with their dazzling red seals and nothing clear about them except the dotted line for her name.

She had another town lot, though. That was what had brought her out on such a questionable adventure to-day. Dan had sold it too, but when he came home with arrangements all made to take her to town the next day to sign the papers

again, she gave him the biggest surprise of his married life by saying she didn't want to sell; she wanted to keep that lot—her father had given it to her.

And Dan had laughed, a very indulgent, unnatural laugh for Dan, and said she was "such a whimsical little woman." However it was much better to sell the lot and turn the money into the farm where it would be safe for the children; so he had sold it. He wanted to make that quite clear; *the lot was already sold;* all that remained was to sign the papers.

And Mary with that quiet immovableness that sometimes takes possession of those gentle, pliable, unquestioning women, replied that she was sorry, but she wouldn't sign the papers. She didn't say why. She didn't mention that the farm was running deeper into debt every year; that it was already proving more of an injury than a help to the children, and that in this remnant of her inheritance lay the only hope she had of ever giving them anything better. She just repeated slowly, a bit shakily, and looking down at the spout of her tea-pot, that she *wouldn't sign them.*

And then Dan dropped his indulgent, protective attitude quite suddenly. He asked her "what in hell" she expected to do with the lot, then. Did she think she could look after it herself? She knew about as much about business

as a squaw. How was any woman to look after her interests in legal affairs where even a man had to keep his eyes open? And who would be expected to take care of such things for her if not her husband? He also enlarged upon a business man's attitude toward women who cared to mix up in such things instead of keeping their place. Altogether he was very much annoyed over this unexpected check in his affairs. It was extremely humiliating to have to tell Harding that his wife, for sentimental reasons, didn't want the lot sold; besides he needed the money. He had no doubt about getting it ultimately, of course. Several plans might be worked to that end, one of the most feasible being to take Billy out of school because there were no funds forthcoming to hire help. But even under the pressure of this, Mary was risking his further displeasure, and taking a venture that would have seemed madness to her a year ago.

The world seemed swimming around her when she entered the lawyer's office, nervously tucking back the damp hair from her forehead, and painfully conscious of the years-old cut of her dress, the road-dust on her shoes, and her absolute ignorance of what to do. If the lawyer was surprised he didn't show it. His practice was not very pressing in the sleepy little town, and he could afford time to put his clients at ease before proceeding to business.

"You mean," he repeated when she had explained her errand, "that you have changed your mind about the lot; that you would like to see Harding this afternoon?"

She assented with inward panic at the thought of it. "Or would I need to see him? You couldn't just—telephone him or something? I should be getting back, and I wanted to—it seems foolish—but I thought I would like to make my will."

"I see. And you think if you had the lot turned into cash it would be easier to leave it as you want to? I'll just ask Harding to come around. You feel that you know what the lot's worth?"

"Why, I hadn't thought much about that. Father paid five hundred for it, I think."

"That was a long time ago. A dollar doesn't go as far now. Do you remember just what Harding offered Mr. Withers this spring?"

"Six hundred."

The lawyer's mouth hardened a little. He had heard the offer made in his office, and had suspected that Dan wanted to reserve a few hundred for immediate use.

"Better ask for a thousand," he advised casually, "and would you like to put the money out on a mortgage?"

"I'd rather put it in the bank. I want it where it can be got at. That's why I came about the

will. I want it used for the children while they need it, before they come of age. I want it used to send them to school. That could be arranged, couldn't it?"

"I guess so. What about your executor?"

"I hadn't thought of that. How do they generally do?"

"A woman generally makes her husband her executor, but if there is any reason why you would rather have someone else——."

"Certainly not." Mary had come into possession of her dignity with remarkable suddenness. A bright red covered her face, but her head was up, and the eyes that had wandered all over the room in nervous embarrassment before, met the lawyer's squarely with something of a challenge. She even held them there in the face of his amusement while she finished a bit lamely: "But I think I would rather leave it with you to take care of for them, if you would—Dan has so much to look after."

Mary didn't notice the weariness of the way home that night. A strange, new elation carried her aching feet over the bruising, irregular railroad ties. The whole dismal swamp seemed singing with the joy of a breaker passed. Only, when the stars began to come out over the trees, she wondered if the children would be afraid to stay alone, and quickened her steps. Several times she slipped her hand into her bag just to

feel the copy of the will that was to be their safeguard if anything happened. Once she took out her bank-book and peered through the faint moonlight at the dancing figures. She had never had a bank-book before. She had never known what it was to take a ten-dollar bill from a pile, and spend it with luxurious recklessness in white flannelette and nainsook and shirting and various colored calicoes for the children. Then she would gather up the parcels in her aching arms and hurry on again with a thrill of happy anticipation.

A section-man watching her thought her deranged, but Mary knew that she was just beginning to see clearly. She had learned that the laws relating to a woman's property were not framed to be beyond a woman's understanding, and the men hadn't seemed to consider her out of her place. A hot wave went over her when she thought of her ignorance of the simplest parts of the procedure. They had been very kind about it, but some arrangement must be made to teach these things to Jean, and save her the agony of such embarrassment.

So it seems we have one of the great motive forces of human evolution—the ambition of individuals here and there to give their children the things they have missed themselves.

The days after this were filled with a mother's provident setting of her house in order. Piles of

little garments took shape and received their distinguishing hand touches of smocking and embroidery in the cold, weary hours when everyone else was sleeping. When she smoothed them out the soft nap caught on her roughened hands like the clutch of something frail and clinging—something that needed her, and she prayed for life desperately, as though the waters were already covering her.

Then, one day in late November, when Dan had gone on an indefinite itinerary selling incubators, and Billy was trying to harvest the turnip crop, the dinner-bell called over the fields again. Something in the short, quick ring told him the call was urgent, but when he reached the house he could only stare with growing terror. His mother's face and hair were wet with perspiration; her mouth was set hard and white at the edges; her eyes were bright like stars—full of suffering that could not be hidden even from the child. She was sorting through a basket of white stuff and as usual she stopped to reassure him.

"It's all right, Boy. Just take the colt and run and tell Auntie Brown to come."

Through all the hard things that had tried the boy's courage and robbed him of the irresponsibility of childhood, he had never known what real fear was before. It seemed to make his limbs and voice powerless to urge the colt to his hardest run. Only one thing was clear to him—

his mother might die, and she was alone. It was miles farther to the doctor's, but if only Auntie Brown were there! She was as good as a doctor, everyone said, and she was the only physician many of them knew.

Mrs. Brown saw him coming and opened the door before he stopped. She didn't ask him what he came for. She just said she would go right down, and told him to go for the doctor, then called after him to ask if his father was at home, or when he was coming, but Billy didn't answer. Already he was floating down the road on the horse's neck. He might have told her, he reflected, that they didn't know when his father was coming home; his trip had been delayed because he had to stay around until Nell's colt came, but there was no time for gossiping now. Anyway, he couldn't see why anyone should be concerned about where his father was at such a time as this.

The doctor wasn't at home. His wife said she would telephone and send him right down from another case, but to the boy, remembering the look in his mother's eyes when he left her, it seemed as though the fates in general had conspired against him. When he reached home with his lathered, limping colt, the doctor hadn't arrived yet and Mrs. Brown was worried. She wouldn't let him see his mother, but she lifted the corner of a shawl from a white flannel bundle

in the rocking chair and Billy looked. He swallowed his astonishment and looked again, at the squirming, blind, uncomfortable little mite, and sighed. He felt much as he had done when a kindly-intentioned neighbor had unexpectedly thrust into his arms one cold day in winter, a very young, whimpering puppy, when he had no warm place to keep it, and the cows were dry—he couldn't see how he was going to make it very comfortable. Perhaps, however, the dog had developed his sense of responsibility and protection, for he bent down till he could feel the baby's breath in faint, warm little puffs against his face and from the depths of bitter experience, confided his sympathy.

"Poor little beggar," he said. "Just startin' out, ain't you?"

The baby didn't make much difference to the tenor of affairs in the household. When he was three days old his father came home and was glad to see him. A week later Billy discovered that the newcomer was going to get him into serious difficulties. Mrs. Brown had told him, with no uncertain meaning, that if he wanted to keep his mother he would have to help her a lot, and Billy was beginning awkwardly and heroically, because he hated it, to add several new chores about the house to his regular daily programme. On this afternoon he was riding the disc-harrow up the field toward the house

when his mother, who had been washing, came out with a basket of clothes. It occurred to Billy that he might hang out the clothes for her, and he brought down a storm of his father's wrath by urging the horses over the half-frozen clods almost at a trot. He was so sure that his case was justified that he offered a spirited, if terrified, explanation, but Dan wasn't interested in hanging out a washing. Out of all patience with Billy's lack of judgment as a horseman, he demanded with finality, "Don't you know that mare has a colt?"

Then one day, in the winter, the baby dropped out of the world as unceremoniously as he had entered. Dan was away on another business trip when the first heavy snowfall came and the young cattle had to be housed. As she had done in other years, Mary went out to help. The next day the baby had a cold. In a few days more he was fighting a losing battle with pneumonia. His father reached home in time to see him go.

Dan had been proud of the happy, laughing little fellow, with his strong little body and bright, dark eyes, just like his own. He had never cared to handle him much, and he had often sworn moderately when he cried in the night—not at the baby himself, just at the general conspiracy of domestic affairs to disturb a man's sleep. But he had felt a real thrill of pride when anyone who came into the house exclaimed

at his sturdy, perfect little form, at his striking resemblance to his father. Now all this was slipping away under his eyes, and he could do nothing but stand there helpless. There was a hard bitterness in the set of his jaw, and it grew harder as he watched his wife's pitiful, useless efforts and tearless submission. She had been with the baby day and night, through it all, and now, even as she felt the round, clinging arms slowly loosen from around her neck, she was glad his suffering was over. For the first time she seemed to notice that Dan was there. She looked up and waited.

"You killed him," he said. "He hadn't no chance to live. You just killed him. After you had deliberately gone out and waded in the snow for half a day when you knowed better—after you had give it to him, if you couldn't save him yourself, why didn't you get someone who could? Don't look at me like that. If you've a spark of motherliness in you, cry or something."

And, looking down at the little form, before the neighbors sent him out, Dan himself cried, freely and easily as one does at a pathetic play, until the women felt sure that the loss of his child had reformed him. Mary followed him out to the porch, pleading in dry, broken attempts. She reached out and almost touched him, but he folded his arms with a cruelty of aloofness and contempt that was almost dramatic. Then

a hard glitter came into his eyes, and in a steely voice, too low to carry into the house, he said:

"Keep away, will you. 'Tain't only the boy, there, but I *can't trust you.* You've deceived me. I seen Harding yesterday."

And Billy, watching and listening with a child's intuition, saw his mother stagger against the door as she went into the house. The old smouldering hate possessed him wickedly; he had never wanted so much to be a man.

CHAPTER IV.

"He was a boy whose emotions were hidden under mountains of reserve; who could have stood up to be shot more easily than he could have said: 'I love you.' . . . . I have wondered what might have been if some one—some understanding person had recognized his gift, or if he himself as a boy had once dared to cut free. We do not know; we do not know the tragedy of our nearest friend." —David Grayson.

An atmosphere like this does not nurture the most outwardly genial qualities in a boy. When Billy was sixteen he had encased his real personality in a reserve which few people could penetrate. The neighbors admitted that he was civil and steady, but they generally agreed that he was sullen. The premature work and responsibility of the farm may have stiffened his body and hardened his outlook, but it had not affected his growth. In spite of everything, sixteen years found him something of a giant with splendid physical possibilities waiting development, but for the present leaving him awkward, painfully conscious of his size, ashamed of his ignorance, galling under the tyranny and hopelessness of his environment, but keeping his reflections largely to himself. His saving force was his inherited ambition. It never let him rest, but since all the experience of his life had been gleaned, like the steadily decreasing crops, from the unproductive acres of the Swamp Farm, his ambition

lacked direction. On rare occasions he confided secret plans to his mother, but the plans were never practical and there was no prospect of ever working them out. A few books, good and otherwise, that had found their way into the house, were the best information he had of the world outside; but the "good" books his mother had brought from home years ago, and they dealt with problems of a different age altogether, problems solved and forgotten long since; the "other" books had mostly been left by an itinerant hired man, and they were far too new. With it all there was a growing discontent, discontent of the divine order really, but showing itself sometimes in very human guise.

An unrest, a discontent like this, is like to gnaw the heart out of a boy, leaving him a hollow reed to be played upon by any wind that blows. Out in the great open spaces of the green country, of course, we wouldn't expect to find any insidious influence to mar a boy's future, yet it came in one of the commonest ways.

In need of money to meet a debt to his incubator firm, it occurred to Dan that the swamp was full of cedar posts. It meant a lot of work to get the posts out and he had no fondness for the task of laying roads through a boggy stretch of woods and putting in the long hours teaming the posts to the railroad, but Billy could do one man's work, and for the rest he could pick up a

force in town. The men were an unsteady crowd. They didn't care to work many days at a time, and invariably left when they were most needed. Then one day a man called looking for a job. He was a Hercules for strength, quick and sure at his work as a professional lumberman. At night he turned a line of handsprings across the barn floor, and did a series of acrobatic stunts over the brace rod, calculated to fill the spectators with awe and amazement. Billy watched him with more amusement than admiration in his steady brown eyes; athletics had never been given a prominent place in his interests.

The man boarded in the house, of course. He was courteous and considerate in ways the other men had never thought of. He never passed the woodpile without bringing in an armful. He refused to leave his washing to be done. He stayed out of the house as much as possible—and Billy stayed with him. From the first time she saw him, Mary begged Dan to send him away.

Even when he had gone, she wasn't reassured. Billy seemed different. He seemed uneasy and secretive. Often under the questioning of her kind eyes he would redden painfully and look away, and knowing that a boy of sixteen is getting beyond his mother's understanding, she never forced her inquiries further.

Then the thing she had dreaded came. One bitter February morning, while she slept, Billy

came quietly downstairs. In the kitchen the lamp was turned low, and he peered across at the clock. It wasn't quite three. He listened for a second to the two regular breathings in the little bedroom, and it seemed that one of them stopped. The thought that perhaps she suspected him made him feel like a thief, but, he reflected, when she got the note under his pillow she would know that he had meant it for the best, that he would come back, sometime. The thought of what she would have to endure in the while between almost made him give it up, but he reasoned that this was just what he had done times before. It was just "drivelling weakness," as Lou had said. He looked around miserably, wishing he could do something to make her understand; that in some way he could soften the hurt of the discovery in the morning. Standing, shivering in the freezing kitchen, he realized that she had to endure this atmosphere for an hour or two every morning, and at the risk of being heard he lighted the fire. Then he picked up the tightly rolled grain bag that contained his worldly possessions, and went out. For a long time after, he remembered the frosty squeak of the door, the snapping of the frost, like pistols, in the trees, and the daylight peering cold and cheerless into the steely sky, as things following, watching and accusing him.

It was a short, quick run to the railroad to

catch the way-freight laboring up to town, a wait of two hours or more around the sheds there, then a ride on the local express to the Junction, where Lou was to meet him. The ride on the freight and the waiting at the sheds attracted no attention, and as he slid into the end seat of the passenger coach he was glad to find that there was no one there whom he knew. The only person in the car who seemed awake was a young man who looked steadily out of the window and seemed so indifferent to everything around him that Billy felt no fear of his curiosity. When he looked up some minutes later he caught the quiet, genial, interested gaze square on his face, and the young man rose and came down the aisle towards him.

It wasn't just that the young man wanted a diversion. He may have looked bored enough while he stared out of the window at the light breaking over the frozen fields, but that was because he was a little discouraged with his job. He had been trying to figure out approximately how many bushels of grain his formalin solution had saved for the county that year, and whether all this extension work of the Department of Agriculture was worth while. He was on his way now to begin a short course with the young men farther up the county, in the intervals of which he might be required to test the milk from a few dairy herds, secure a few hired men for the

neighborhood, or talk about revenues from chickens, or strawberries to a gathering of women. It occurred to him that the boy who had just come in might be going up to join the class, and because he liked boys as individuals, and because there was something unusually promising in the keen, serious face and striking physique of this young man, he came to talk to him.

Billy had never heard of an agricultural short course. He had seen the agricultural office in town, but he had a very vague idea of what the "district representative" was doing there. He listened to the explanation of the short course with interest; then, as man to man, told candidly what he thought of farming and, naturally enough, why he was leaving it.

The representative didn't ask any questions, but he gathered that Billy was leaving home for the first time, to begin his independent career in a lumber-camp somewhere. He also saw that under the retiring, self-conscious exterior, was a live fuse of ambition, and an unmistakable pride.

"It won't get you anywhere," he said, when Billy asked what he thought of the lumber camp as a beginning, "and if you stay long enough, you won't care whether it does or not. We're having a course next month not so far from your place; come to that and see if you can't find something worth while around home.

Come to the office on Saturday and I'll tell you of a dozen fellows who have made good with a worse start than you have."

The train was stopping at the Junction. "Sorry," Billy replied, rising. "I have to meet a friend here."

He took up his grain-bag, reddening. He had a momentary idea of leaving it under the seat, but it contained everything he had left.

"You can get a train back home in ten minutes," the Representative suggested, with a friendly grip. "I'll look for you Saturday."

"I'm sorry I didn't meet you sooner," Billy replied calmly. "As it is, I've promised to go north. Anyway I think perhaps you don't understand just how things are at our place."

The Representative looked away and frowned with sympathy. "I know it's rotten enough," he said, "but if you want to play fair, why don't you go back and put it right up to your father? You know this is pretty rough on the mother."

And Billy, standing alone on the platform, wished the representative had kept that last argument to himself. That was what had been his undoing every time before, and Lou had shown him quite clearly that he could never do anything for his mother by staying on the wretched farm where they could scarcely make enough to keep alive. Now this young man said he could show him how to make money out of the

place. He said that boys with a worse beginning had gone ahead right at home and made good, even realized their ambitions for themselves and made the right kind of homes for their families. Family considerations weren't troubling Billy. He was just sixteen years old, and the social side of his nature had been sadly neglected. What he wanted was freedom to do something. Then, while Lou had persuaded him that he was not only a fool, but a weak one to stay at home, this agricultural fellow had somehow made him feel like a coward for running away.

The train for home was whistling nearer while Billy argued wildly. When it came around the bend he had about made his decision. He picked up his grain bag and sauntered coolly across to meet it, then he saw Lou coming, and waited.

It was not easy to dispose of Lou—he had met cases like this before; but Billy's struggles from childhood, with a man's work, crop failures, an unjust government and himself, had not been for nothing. Also, a certain dogged will-power, bred of these struggles, and their achievements, and more than ever dominant in the teen age, gave him an aversion to being "talked into" anything. The Representative hadn't shown any effort at trying to persuade him. He had told him just what he thought without reserve and quite forcibly enough, it seemed; then he had left him to make his own decision, and it gave Billy no

little pride in himself to know that he was planning his own course. He felt, suddenly, above the wheedling, anxious tone of his former leader, who, he decided, didn't have enough brains to keep his personal concern out of his argument. Exasperated at last, Lou swore openly at all "young milk-fed Rubes who would keep a man hanging around for weeks, not knowing their own minds, and then fail to come across at the last."

And Billy laughed—laughed right into the threatening face with its hardened cunning, laughed for pure joy at the new spirit that had just awakened in him, laughed also because he had measured carefully the distance to the last car of the moving train. He caught it just in time to leave Lou clutching foolishly at the place where he had been.

Miles away the Representative had again relapsed into speculation as to whether his work was worth while.

It was only a few hours from the time Billy left the Swamp Farm until he walked up the lane again, but it seemed as though he had been in a new, bigger country for a long time. He saw the limits of his environment in a new perspective and they looked less binding. The feel of the familiar, worn little door-latch under his hand carried a distinct sense of being back in the right place. Mary, with a way women have

of watching the road while they work, had seen him coming. It wasn't in her nature to cry out, or to take him in her arms. She just stood immovable, her breath coming fast, but in the glad welcome illuminating the drawn lines of her patient face the boy saw all the wonder of a mother's unquestioning love, and he knew it would have been the same, however, or whenever he had come back—if she were still there. She didn't ask him where he had been; she didn't mention the note he had left; she only said:

"You haven't had your breakfast."

And Billy, because he was sixteen years old and practised in curbing his emotions, could not go to her. He just looked back as eloquently as he could, and asked:

"Where's Jean?"

Jean was crumbled up on the bed in her little cold room upstairs, crying her heart out. Billy could manage with her more easily. He gathered her up and patted her back and smoothed her hair so awkwardly that it tangled about his fingers. He said he shouldn't have done it, and then told her quite firmly to stop now right away; that he was back and he was going to stay. He was fast becoming a man.

Even Dan realized this when Billy met him in the stable for an interview. The plans he had been designing began to lose shape in the fearlessness of the new individual whom he had al-

ways considered his child to mould as he liked. Billy's experience had not given him much of the quality called business sense, so he didn't ask much—a percentage of whatever profits he could show from the place above an estimate for previous years, and a chance to run a few sidelines of his own. Since this would not interfere with his own interests and would mean still having free labor on the farm, Dan was willing to grant it.

And Billy was happy. He couldn't have told why. Practically, he was just where he had been before; only he had something to hope for. In the house the ham sizzling in the pan, the smell of turnips cooking for dinner and a spicy apple pie bubbling on the back of the stove, filled him with a very tangible comfort. The world had never seemed so near to heaven.

The agricultural course was full of promise. For some time Billy had been painfully reminded of his scant education. The few brief seasons in the local school, following the cramped and theoretical course of prescribed text-books, and his ill chosen reading afterwards, had not given him much that a young man would need. A class of twenty young farmers leaving their work to meet every day in a room above the local store was different; it had some purpose. The informal lectures and discussions were practical from the beginning. The taking of notes, the preparation

of a speech, was new and hard for every one of them, but they were all at the same disadvantage, which carried some encouragement.

On the second day of the course they went to a farm for a class in stock-judging. Boys who would have wormed through a barbed-wire entanglement to get within touching distance of the prize animals at the provincial fair, but who might as well have hoped to enter a sacred temple as a show ring, could examine to their hearts' content the most aristocratic specimens of Aberdeen-Angus lineage in the country. Added to their instruction in rules and principles they had the unstinted and practical advice of the man himself who had built up the herd, whose name was known to stockmen in every province of the Dominion.

When they had finished he took them to the house. There was a great, long living-room with red curtains and a log blazing in a brick fireplace, and his wife, in a big blue apron, her cheeks red from the warmth of the kitchen stove, gave them hot biscuits and coffee. The man's voice boomed heartily through the house, and the baby from a quilt on the floor reached up to him. It was amazing the dexterity with which he could tuck the babe away, perfectly contented, in the hollow of his arm, and use both hands in expounding the points of various Panmures and Black Megs, with the history of their ancestors

from the oldest farms in Scotland. He made no effort to keep his business affairs out of his home, this man; the two were so intimately connected that their interests were common. Either would have failed long ago without the support of the other. His wife knew exactly what he was talking about. Her pride in the herd was about as great as his own; she had made little sacrifices and taken with him the risks involved in buying new, expensive stock. It was a fine kind of co-operation.

The warmth and peace and genuineness of it all filled Billy with a happy wonder. He forgot to be embarrassed, but he sat in a corner as much out of sight as possible, watching the restful air of content about the woman, and listening to the man's enthusiastic forecast of the future of the breed in Canada. The stockman noticed his interest, and when they were ready to go he kept the rest waiting while he took him back to go more fully into the peculiar traits of a certain family. Then he asked:

"What do you keep at home?"

"Most anything," Billy answered, with a grim little smile.

"You ought to get on with stock," the expert remarked, sincerely. "Come to me when you start for yourself and I'll give you a bargain on some better than these, if nothing happens."

Billy looked at the square, curly little beasts

as a cripple stares at an athlete's cup. Then he found all his wandering ambitions coming to a point. Some day he would have a herd of such cattle. He could see their perfect black shapes moving over a sunny field when the autumn frosts had turned the trees and pastures to a glorious gold and crimson background. They would be *his,* and when he had some of them graded up to a show standard, he himself would groom their curly hides till they shone; he could almost feel the shaking muscles of their broad, level backs as they stood under the hands of the judges. And there would be a house with red curtains and an open fire, where his mother would be safe and comfortable as long as she lived. He fervently hoped his father's business would continue to take him away from home a lot.

At night he sat up late over a borrowed Aberdeen-Angus history. He sketched over all the paper in the house to show how certain individuals he had seen that day compared with types illustrated. He estimated with reckless optimism what it would cost to start a herd, and how long it would take them to pay for a house with a fireplace and red curtains. At intervals he would get up and walk around the table to work off his enthusiasm. There was nothing reserved about his plans now. His mother felt that her cup was full. She was sure her prayers

for his direction had been answered and she blessed "that agricultural young man" as an agent sent by Heaven.

CHAPTER V.

"What is a butterfly? At best
She's but a caterpillar, drest."
—Benjamin Franklin.

The dreams of our youth are long in coming true. When at last they do arrive we have worked so hard for them, watched them grow from such humble, unpromising beginnings, come through so much commonplace, grinding routine, that we do not recognize them as the reality of the vision that carried us up to the clouds years before.

The more definite Billy's ideal became, the farther it receded, until at last it seemed so impossible that he said little about it. The only man whom he hoped to believe in it was the District Representative. He had helped him in the selection of a flock of sheep to trim down the rough corners of the neglected farm. He had used his influence to get him credit on a bunch of shaggy, bony calves to turn into the waste places in the spring, and had been the first person to laugh with him over the cheque in the fall. He had initiated him in the art of mixing cement, with the result that the stables, the cellar and the porch around the house were made dry and solid. He had surveyed for drains through a field that

had never grown much but bulrushes, and Billy had another two acres of black loam added to his tillable area. Oh, he was an all-round man, that Representative, with the tentacles of his office reaching out to a thousand sources for help, and placing it to the best of his knowledge wherever anyone in his territory wanted it.

It was the Representative who revealed to Billy at last that the thing he needed before he would ever be satisfied with anything else was more education. Billy knew that he wanted an education, but he also wanted the fields, the steady quieting toil of seed time and harvest, the care of the cattle, the directing of life and growth with all their mysteries and miracles, and their unfailing obediences to natural laws. He was a born farmer, but he would never be content to farm blindly, mechanically, as an animal follows prey, for an existence. The best solution for his case seemed to be the agricultural college.

A college year leaves considerable free time in the twelve months, and Billy managed somehow to keep the tillable acres of the farm under crop and to harvest what he planted. The first year initiated him into a dozen phases of learning that he had never heard of before. In the second year, partly by accident, partly through the insight of a few semi-professionals, it was discovered that he had some unusual athletic possibilities, and Billy loosened up from his grind

sufficiently to learn the hard, clean strain of rugby and hockey, and to warm up daily in the gymnasium. It opened up a new world for him. In his whole life he had never before learned to play, and as it put a new spring in his muscles, a new physical joy of living in his existence, it began to clear away the cloud that had sobered and darkened his outlook. It was in his third year, at the term's closing dance before Christmas, that he had another awakening.

Up to this time, every attempt of his classmates to draw him across the girls' campus had failed. The magic force had come to him on the rink that afternoon. A gay little figure in a white wool skating outfit, with a brave dash of crimson here and there, chasing a hockey puck down the ice, skated very close to him, lost the puck around his skates somehow, and as he returned it, she turned in his direction for a moment the most naive, childish gaze from a pair of wonderful blue eyes. At night, to the amazement of his friends, he went to the dance. The girl might be as unattainable as a royal princess—he was quite sure she was; yet, as millions of men had done before him, he took the trail of the impossible with a hope that really promised nothing.

She made the first picture he saw when he went in, standing like a rare bit of Italian china on a space of polished floor, the magnet of a train of sleekly-groomed, linen-bosomed young men.

Absently Billy was having a programme thrust upon him. Dazedly the admonition was being borne in on him that he would be expected to do his duty to the end, and distribute himself around well. Already he was entangled, introduced to a girl wearing a committee badge, and his escort deserted him.

The committee girl didn't disturb his equilibrium at all. It wasn't necessary to pay much attention to her; she didn't seem to expect it. She was there for a purpose, to put people at ease, the rare individuals of the twentieth century youth who needed this ministration—and to shuffle them. She handled Billy's case by reassuring him from the frankest and friendliest eyes he had ever looked into, then following the direction of his gaze, she led him directly to the regal little figure with its buzzing circle of attendants.

Miss Evison's greeting was not so alluring as her wide baby stare in the afternoon. She turned her meaningless, drawing-room gaze toward him with the indifference due one of her innumerable courtiers, and even glanced with immovable correctness at his hand extended half way across the distance between them. Billy brought the hand back painfully. He had known better, of course, but it seemed such a humanly natural thing to do. Come to think of it, he had shaken hands with the committee girl too, but she must have met him half way, or something, be-

cause he had never thought of it until now. There was something decidedly chilling, too, in Miss Evison's clear, blase, very "nice girl," how-do-you-*do,* and not being a connoisseur in the ways of women, he took it for a dismissal and turned to go.

Miss Evison had not anticipated this danger. He was walking right away from her, with his rare six feet of athlete, his good looks, and his whole unique farmerish appearance that would make such a striking background for the evening.

She had to think quickly and she was not accustomed to the process.

"I—I think I noticed you at the rink this afternoon?" she threw out desperately.

It was very bad, of course. She should never have admitted that she ever noticed anyone anywhere. It was a decided compromise from the standards she upheld so carefully, and the high tint of excitement in her cheeks deepened and burned at the mistake. Billy sincerely looked his gratitude for the recognition. It was so much more than he had expected from this queenly little personage, with the whole of her narrow little circumscribed world at her feet. He found something very sweet and womanly in the deepening color, in the maidenly lifting and lowering of her eyes—very wonderful eyes they seemed, large and long-lashed, with the beautiful, deep blue and little brown specks that Nature had

given them, and the thousand little tricks, flashes and mists and a half-closed dreaminess for which Nature was not responsible at all. They could never be called soft in their expression, but they could be very mysterious. Yet the girl was only twenty.

Billy was not a novice at dancing. He had spent many a night gliding over the candle-waxed floor in the town hall at home. He would never take Jean to these affairs; he hated their atmosphere himself, but he was very human in his fondness for the poetry of motion, and there was very little poetry of anything else in his life. From the time he entered the ball-room, it was his habit to dance constantly until he decided to stop—then he went home. Sometimes, for reasons of his own, he left earlier, but never because he was tired of the dance itself. Here the tone was different.

Unconsciously he attracted some attention by dancing three times in succession with the popular Miss Evison. She had demurred playfully over the second, and seriously over the third, but when Billy apologized for his selfishness, she gave it to him very sweetly. She even managed, though he would never have thought of suggesting it, to give him the second half of an extra, because it does give a certain prestige to a girl's social standing to have to cut into her dances—and Billy made such a noticeable figure coming

across to claim this mere fragment of her evening, and covering her with confusion, in her effort to be nice to everybody.

In the intervals when she was away from him, Billy stood in the shadows and watched her with a sober tenderness, something akin to worship. She was as remote as the stars, he knew, yet a moment before he had felt her soft, clingy scarf blowing against his face. She was so sort of set apart, so uncertain, so alluringly feminine, from the transparent drape about her white shoulders, and the American Beauties trembling against her with every breath, to her frail, little high-heeled shoes, and he thought happily that she would always need a man to take care of her, to work for her, and to give her these things. Then he came back to earth heavily. He thought of the bleak little, weather-worn house on the Swamp Farm, with the fire now covered up for the night in the chilly kitchen, and the oil lamp turned low. To-morrow night he would be back, it would be Christmas Eve, and until the last few hours the thought of it exalted him. Now it hovered like the proverbial little cloud darkening his skies.

He began to make his way out of the gymnasium with its confusion of crashing music, delicate tinted dresses, gay shaded lights and gliding figures trailing their white shadows after them along the polished floor. Then it occurred

to him that he might see Miss Evison again on the pretext of saying good-night.

Miss Evison wasn't accustomed to this ceremony from the rank and file of the college body. She was rather surprised, but she was too much occupied to be much interested. The diversion was a senior student who was considered exceedingly "interesting" that term, and who had been inattentive enough the last while to set a special premium on his society.

"Oh, going? I'm sorry!" she flipped off in the clear, smooth *staccato* that always came when she had no point in particular. She didn't offer him her hand, of course not—and Billy went out vaguely unhappy.

The train for home would leave in the afternoon. There were many things Billy could have done with the morning, but he paced moodily among the term's wreckage in his room. About ten o'clock a crowd of girls passed the window and a crimson scarf flying from a white skating outfit brought him to, suddenly. The next minute he was unstrapping his trunk and groping for his skates.

Miss Evison in her skating rigs seemed far more of a flesh and blood creation than when she was made up for the evening. She was less formal, too, and Billy felt more sure of himself. They had made one circle of the rink when a new crowd of students came in. Billy didn't know

them; they belonged to a clique by themselves. They could steer a toboggan down a hill, or balance a tea-cup with the dexterity of long practice. Why they had chosen agriculture as a profession was a mystery, but from the standpoint of tearooms, flowers and theatres, they were very select young men. As she passed them with her new attendant, Miss Evison observed that their attention was casual and it set her thinking. She realized that perhaps she had been overdoing things. It was one thing to let the attentions of a very good-looking and unknown young man create a sensation at a dance, and quite another matter to keep up the acquaintance.

After rapid consideration, she cut right into Billy's enthusiastic account of the carnival after the last hockey match with a sister college. She didn't interrupt him rudely, of course. If you're just socially cultivated enough you can do anything without being rude.

"I had almost forgotten," she said, "this is the last skate of the year. A lot of the people I know are here, and I don't want to be—exclusive."

"I'm sorry," he apologized. "I should have thought, but it seemed such a little time."

It had been a little time, scarcely five minutes, and it occurred to her that possibly he had more intuition than she suspected. It was not at all what she desired, that this boy from the country, whom she had chosen to be nice to, should ques-

tion anything she wanted to do, whether it was right or not.

"Perhaps the men here are too appreciative of trifles," she remarked stiffly. "It may be different in the country."

Billy took her back silently. Things *were* very different in the country; if she only knew how different, he surmised, she would despise him even more. Turning dazedly to go off the ice he ran right into the committee girl.

It was fortunate that the speed of his arms measured up pretty well with the force of his body, otherwise the girl might have had a bad fall. As it was, there was a blue mark on her shoulder that she kept hidden for some days. The fear that it might be there troubled Billy not a little. He dropped his hand and stood there terrified.

"Thank you," she said, "I was just about gone," and then she laughed, just naturally laughed at his confusion, laughed with a frank, reassuring kindness in her friendly eyes, and just as unconcernedly as he had met her the night before, Billy found himself skating down the ice with her. He found himself talking to her without restraint and quite on a level. Then she introduced him to a crowd of the finest girls he had ever known. Altogether, he was having a very good time. He had almost forgotten the agony it gave him to see Miss Evison sweep past, listen-

ing with rapt attention, evidently, to the social oratory of the "interesting" man, when a thin little voice beside him almost whispered—

"Was I terribly horrid?"

If she had been alluring before in her many variable little moods, she was irresistible when she put all that childish appeal to be forgiven into her misty eyes and pouting mouth. Billy looked and wondered. He couldn't see that she had done much to require forgiveness, but it made him very happy to have her come back; so he laughed into her troubled eyes as one does to a penitent child, and answered:—

"I think you were. How far will you come now to make up for it?" Considering his inexperience, he was playing up to her lead very well.

She would go any distance. She would even skate with him a little while after the others had all gone—if he had time before his train left. She told him in broken, embarrassed little phrases, that she was impulsive, that she guessed she was spoiled, but she was always sorry after she had been rude; she would do anything to make up, she wanted always to be kind, because she just couldn't stand it not to have people love her.

And Billy replied gallantly that he didn't see how anyone could help it.

They had the ice to themselves now, and as they swept down the clear, wide stretch they

were unutterably happy. At least Billy was. He didn't know that the sudden change in her attitude was due to the fact that he had established his favor with the best girls of the college that morning. If he had known he might have appreciated the kindness of the committee girl even more.

Miss Evison explained her high spirits on the ground that she was going home that night. Mother and Dad had both written that they were dying to see her—that was the worst of being an only child. She had an inkling that Dad was getting her a little runabout for Christmas, sort of a bribe to keep her from wanting to go back to the city next year. Oh, yes, they had a farm—just a hobby, of course. Oh, no, they didn't live on it. They had a house in the nearest town; there were several congenial families living there, and it was near enough to the city to go in to a show when there was anything really good. But, oh, she loved the country—just loved it.

And what did she think of the college? She loved it, too. She would be sorry when her year was up. She had met some of the *dearest* girls, and she had had a perfectly *lovely* time. She hadn't wanted to come in the first place, but Dad had just insisted; he said she was going far too fast at home—it really was hard to get an evening in, because there were some *very* nice people in the town, for the size of it, and she was *so* fond

of company and excitement. She could just live on it. She told him, with the naivete of a child, of her many amusing culinary disasters, after she had begun to study household science; how the last time she was at home she had *insisted* on getting tea on the maid's afternoon off; how the souffle had fallen flat and she had forgotten to put the cream of tartar in the biscuits.

When she suddenly remembered that she had an engagement in the afternoon, Billy took off her skates something after the manner of a slave kneeling at the feet of the Queen of Sheba.

"Just to think," she chattered, "our last skate this year, and I've talked all about myself. The next time you must tell me all about *your* affairs, and your holidays, and everything."

Billy smiled and looked away. He realized painfully how difficult it would be to tell this beautiful, irresponsible, "delicately-reared" girl anything about himself or his holidays or anything.

When he opened the Hall door for her she drew from her muff her smooth, supple little hand without even its glove, held it out to him warmly, and left him thrilling from the contact. She rushed upstairs glowing; she had had a glorious time and there were a thousand more glorious times ahead of her—not with Billy—oh, dear no. She confided to a circle of her dearest girl friends that he was "all right in an agricultural setting," he was "awfully handsome in

his lumbering yeoman style," he was "splendid to have looking at you with his sober eyes, as though you were a Madonna, or an actress, or something," but Billy "transplanted to a circle of the class of people a girl would want to live with—heavens!"

And Billy, rushing for his train, staring out at the flying white fields, or figuring on the back of the latest market report of beef cattle, was possessed of one thought. He must make his plans work out; he must be ready to turn things into money fast; he must be successful in some way or other; and he wasn't thinking of the folks at home this time. He didn't notice the old familiar landmarks until the train stopped at the home station.

Jean was there to meet him. She had her arms around his neck almost before he reached the platform, and would not let him go till he had fairly crushed the breath out of her.

"And how's everything?" he asked.

"Just fine—only Mother!"

"Is anything wrong?"

"No, I guess not. She just doesn't seem very well sometimes."

Somehow the news filled Billy with foreboding; he could only picture some awful change. He was impatient to get home, yet, so suddenly awakened from his dream of other things, he felt like a stranger as they neared the old place.

How little and lonely the house looked in the thickening dusk with the lamplight making red squares of the windows—the frost already creeping out from the edges of the panes, and the white smoke floating up from the two little chimneys. There was a fire in the parlor to-night—a sign of festivity for his homecoming.

The horse had scarcely turned in at the lane when the kitchen door opened, and in the light flooding out, Mary stood waiting with the lantern, on duty as usual. She seemed very frail and little as she hurried to meet him, very pathetic too, with her face lifted shyly, not knowing just what to expect, aching to express her love, but fearful of doing the wrong thing. They grow away from their mothers so fast, these men-children; they get so involved in things outside that the mother who stays at home trembles for the time when they will have ceased to need her.

As she bustled around in happy confusion putting the finishing touches to the supper, Billy struggled to adjust himself. The ceiling of the little room seemed very close to his head, the walls very confining as he paced about, but he noticed that the floor was scrubbed white, that the curtains had been laundered until they fairly bristled out into the room. His foot disturbed a rag mat with some yellow birds hooked into it, and when he got down to straighten it, some good fortune prompted him to observe:

"This is something new."

"Well, to think you'd notice that! I was afraid I wasn't going to get it done in time. Do you remember that plaid? It's some of the first kilts you had. The brighter pieces I've worked into a quilt for you when you have a house of your own —if you'd want it."

Billy did some quick imagining, then, as if challenging some argument against the patched quilt.

"Sure I'd want it," he said. "I should think *I would* want it."

All evening he watched to see whether there was any ground for Jean's fears. It never occurred to him that his mother, with her tactful simplicity, might be watching him too. It was not until after Jean had gone to bed that they came nearer to an understanding. For a few minutes she knitted while he watched her and listened to the clock ticking on towards midnight. Then without looking up she asked:

"Did you have any good times this term?"

She had never inquired about his "good times" before, and he wondered, half pleased, how she knew. He felt a pleasant warmth covering his face as he answered:

"A few, toward the last."

She didn't seem to notice his embarrassment. She suggested casually:

"Let's move up closer to the stove and open the

door. It's as good as a fireplace when you want to talk."

He knew she hoped he would tell her more, and he wished he could, but there was nothing to tell. To repeat anything Miss Evison had said —and heaven knows he remembered every word —wouldn't give a right impression of her at all. You had to *see* her to get any idea of what she was like. Besides there was something about her whole airy, pleasure-loving, exotic presence that didn't seem to fit in here. He liked to shut his eyes and picture her as she looked standing under the cluster of rose-shaded lights in the college ballroom, but when he opened them on the neat, square little kitchen, with the wood-box behind the stove and the bleary little lamp throwing shadows in the corners, the vision tortured him with the weight of something irreparably wrong. He started from his reverie, remembering that the last thing his mother had said was to the effect that the stove with the door open was as good as a fireplace.

"We were going to have a fireplace of our own, weren't we?" he began. "You must be tired waiting for it, but it won't be long now. If I can get through next year——"

He thought he saw the patient lines draw across her face, but she smiled naturally enough.

"It will be fine to be through," she said, "but you mustn't worry about the fireplace yet. And

I must tell you, too, because I have to bring myself to it, that you're a man now. I want you to have your house and your fireplace and everything just like you want it; but you mustn't go putting your mother in your plans; it isn't natural. I'd like to see it all, and I'd be so pleased about it—to know you were happy, but young people want their own life. Only there's one thing I like to feel safe about—you'll always look out for Jean? I'm glad I can be sure about that."

And for the first time, watching her as she stared into the fire, her knitting lying forgotten in her lap, Billy saw the change he had been looking for. He came over and knelt beside her in all a boy's helplessness, tears swimming unhidden in his eyes.

"What is it?" he asked. "Jean said you were not well. What about it?"

He felt her start, but she smiled back as she had done hundreds of times before when things disturbed him.

"It's nothing," she said.

"Did you see the doctor?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

She had been trying ever since to forget what the doctor said.

"Oh! He said something about a specialist. They have to say something."

"You—wouldn't mind going to the specialist?"

"No; but we can't think of it now. I don't feel bad at all. You see I have everything so comfortable since you fixed the house."

Billy had the happy faculty of making his decisions quickly under pressure.

"But why can't we go to the specialist now?" he persisted quietly. "I'm not going away again till you're better. There's the money for the next term; we'll use that. Then I'll be here. I can surely make things a little better in some ways."

"Oh, no," she protested in alarm. "You mustn't think of that. I want to see you get through. If it was the money, there's some in the bank, but——"

"You want to keep that for Jean, don't you?"

"I do want her to go on to school. I want her to learn some way of making her living. And if Jean should ever get married——"

"Oh, Jove, we'll not let her get married," he exploded with a determination born of his own limited and bitter observation. "I certainly don't believe in getting married—for girls."

It took more than Billy's inexperienced force of argument to persuade his mother that he would not be happy anywhere but at home for the next few months—that the farm was suffering for his attention anyway. When she did agree to his plan it was because she found that in some things

he was absolutely immovable. He could be steered easily enough to a certain point; after that all the winds of heaven couldn't influence his course. Even the disturbing visitations of the vision of the satin-shod idol, never once suggested the idea that he might go back.

CHAPTER VI.

"That a girl may make five dollars a day in a canning club during the summer, or a boy win a prize of one hundred dollars for feeding a baby beef, is one of the lesser advantages of the great national movement which has caught the imaginative enthusiasm of the Young Generation. It is really leading the way to a finer community life. Many of us remember the old-fashioned chicken suppers in the basement of the church, where the boys sat on the benches by themselves, while the girls looked pityingly and shyly across the intervening space. The club boys and girls in this great industrial college, allied artists in the creation of a better country life, are changing all this. Nothing in rural life has ever been the medium of such good times."—Stanley Johnson.

Dan heard of the intended visit to the city doctor with astonishment and annoyance. It wasn't like Mary to want such a thing, and he attributed it to some more of Billy's "higher life" ideas. He repeatedly unburdened his bitterness to Mary in Billy's absence, that he had been fool enough to let him go to school just to come home with his superior ways. To outsiders he had a habit of remarking: "My boy, he's in college now. Costs a good deal—an education, nowadays, but I want him to have the best I can give him."

Regarding the consulting of a special doctor he openly disapproved, on the grounds that all a doctor hung out his sign for was to get people's

money. He had never had a doctor in his life and he never would have one. The best rule he knew for health was to "forget it." Then Billy came in and he stopped. When Mary came home at night and took up the threads of her work where she had dropped them in the morning, however, he rested more easily. He inquired, apparently amused at the whole affair, when she was going back again, and she said she didn't have to go back. He reflected then, that it was only a "notion," as he had supposed, and was satisfied.

It was different with Billy. A dozen times a day he came into the house and waited around awkwardly, without asking any questions, but the most his mother ever said about the subject that troubled him was that it was "about time to take the tonic," as though the completeness of her heart's desire was assured through that proceeding. Billy had never known her to appear so happy and he knew in his heart that while she had opposed so seriously his staying at home, she felt a support in his presence. A strange dread haunted him that the time might come when she would need him still more. His first important step in the farming operations was to provoke his father's wrath by the extravagance of adding a bathroom to the house. It was a very simple affair, built on a level with the ground floor, with a hand-force pump and cement storage tank, but

it gave a satisfying touch of comfort and refine ment.

Early in the New Year Billy received a scribbled note from the District Representative. "Can you help us with our short course? We have about thirty enrolled for the boys' class, pretty good fellows practically, but most of them, I dare say, could have had all the schooling they ever got crowded into two full years. To make matters worse, we're putting on a course for the girls—cooking and the like. A girl taking some post-graduate work at the college is coming down. I expect the thing will develop into considerable of a nuisance before we're done with it, but we'll have to see it through."

Billy's sympathies were aroused. He readjusted his plans so he could get five days a week off, went to call on the Representative and found him troubled.

"You see, it wouldn't be so bad," explained that work-driven, detail-harrassed official, "if it were not for this girls' affair. Even if they'd keep to themselves it wouldn't matter so much, but I understand there are to be tobogganings and skating-parties and socials—sort of a sleigh-ride-and-taffy-pull phase of the keep-the-young-people-on-the-farm movement, and I expect it will leave them a hundred per cent. more of the hoyden, or a hundred per cent. more buried in the

Slough of Sentimentality than if they'd never been the object of an uplift."

"I expect it will be the best thing that ever happened them," said Billy. "Were you ever so scared of a girl that when you went to a neighbor's in the evening you'd go around to the stable first and wait there till some of the boys came out and took you into the house, sort of under cover?"

"No," came witheringly from his superior.

"And did you ever find yourself left alone with a girl that you'd known or should have known all your life, a really good-sense, clever girl who must have had lots of ideas of her own, but neither of you could advance any conversation at all because you hadn't the first shade of a common ground or a common interest? There was nothing to do but try to imitate the smart talk of the imported store-clerk, or go, so because you didn't want to make a complete donkey of yourself you generally went?"

"I should say not."

"Or if you were an easy prey to the hoodlum element hanging around almost every country village, you possibly found your recreation in shooting peas from the back seat of the church at tea-meetings, or cutting harness, or stretching wires across the road on dark nights. When you reached the age of more civil instincts the most alluring social interest was to follow the public

balls from one end of the country to the other. You met the same people, or the same class of people, night after night, and you stayed till four o'clock in the morning. Before it was done half the men would be glazed-eyed and unsteady, and the girls looking dragged out, but sort of tolerating it all; and some of them the best girls in the country, too. They must have gone home heart-sick of it, but they always came back; you can't wonder much—there was a lot they didn't know and there wasn't any other excitement in their lives. A minister in the village here ventured the idea of fitting up a gymnasium in the basement of the church and having moving pictures on Wednesday nights, but one old reprobate of an elder opposed it until it was dropped. He considered it profanity in the first degree, and anyway he didn't want his daughter going to picture shows or dressing up in gymnasium rigs, but every time she came down to the post office, a new arrival in the village who had come to open a pool-room over the carriage-shop, a social and moral worm, as every man in the place knew, walked part way home with her. She wouldn't have tolerated him a minute if she could have seen him in comparison with decent men, but her father didn't believe in the "safety in numbers" fact. She ran away with the pool promoter and married him, and all the time there were a dozen honest, well-intentioned fellows

native to the farms around, any one of whom she might just as possibly have married, but didn't for the very good reason that she didn't know them. I believe this co-education venture will be the best move yet in the 'rural sociology' scheme."

"Well, then, before your enthusiasm cools, I wish you'd go and take a look at the hall we have to fix up for a demonstration kitchen."

Billy looked at the hall and reported. The next day he brought his tools, and according to directions improvised a table from some rough lumber, nailed some boxes together for a cupboard, then swept out his shavings and incidentally the dust from a year's meetings of the county council. On the third day he was commissioned to meet the train bringing the teacher.

Billy was not given to questioning orders, but he stopped unloading chairs from a wood-rack to look his chief over with open defiance.

"I'll do anything in reason," he said. "I'll haul the furniture from any part of the county till we get the place equipped. I'll blacken the stove or scrub the floor if I have to, but I don't feel at all equal to meeting any post-graduate domestic science girl and escorting her up to the Royal Hotel. I wouldn't be surprised if she'd sit right down on the steps and cry."

"More likely to sit right down and give you five minutes to find a better place or get a taxi to take her home."

"Only that there isn't any better place."

"Why won't some of the women take her?"

"Some of them claim to have had previous experience with 'lady speakers.' The general trouble, however, is that she comes from the city —is rumored to be something of an aristocrat and the people are afraid of her."

In spite of these scattered feelings of fear and hostility, the teacher had a pretty fair attendance the first day. The second day it seemed as though some one, probably the girls themselves, had done some additional advertising. Toward the close of the afternoon the Representative suggested to Billy that he go up and see if she wanted anything.

The classes were over, but the girls were still there, and sounds unlike the scraping of pans or handling of dishes, or anything else pertaining to domestic science, came from the room. The door was open, and instead of finding the students bending over a yeast culture or copying the food constituents of cereals, he saw twenty or more girls coming down the hall practising the minuet. The teacher was there, with her back to him, demonstrating, of course; the girls themselves had never seen the minuet before— and Billy stood watching, open mouthed, for a full minute, before someone saw him, and the dance broke up in confusion. He came forward

to apologize to the teacher and when she turned he remembered; she was the "committee girl."

The class filed out bashfully, and the teacher gave Billy some idea of what she was trying to do. Evidently she thought some explanation was due. The minuet, she explained, was part of some physical culture she was working into the course, and he heartily approved. He had observed a neighbor's daughter, an awkward girl of sixteen, stiffened and sobered from the care of the family of younger children, actually relaxing and taking the bend with considerable grace. He had noticed the stolid, stoop-shouldered girl from the Home, whose pride, almost her self-respect, had been crushed out of existence, curving her spine and lifting her head in admirable imitation of Miss Macdonald's poise. He didn't wonder at this at all. If ever a school of physical culture turned out a model it must be this girl, with her slim, perfect physique, her quiet, supple carriage, her entire absence of self-consciousness. Her whole personality radiated a wholesomeness. From her regular, white teeth, her hair still shining from the brush and sending out little rusty glints from the brown hollows where the light struck it, to her white linen uniform and classy low-heeled shoes, she carried the mark of the thoroughbred. And feeling the warmth of her kind, happy eyes, hazel or gray or whatever they were, it didn't matter, Billy al-

most decided that these things were worth more than being pretty. He considered bringing Jean home from school for the two weeks—not for the sake of the course, just for the atmosphere.

In spite of her poise he surmised that she was taking her job pretty seriously.

"The playing part of it," she explained, "will be questioned a good deal, I'm afraid; it isn't outlined in the programme, but I believe it's almost the most important here. Most of the girls can cook pretty well; you can tell by the way they listen to the reasons why you put meat to cook in cold water for soup, and boiling water for a stew; and by the questions they ask about why specialists have decided that it's better to keep a baby's feeding four hours apart instead of two. You can't give them very much in two weeks, but they have so much that is practical to begin on that they can go right ahead and apply almost any principle they learn. When they're through here they should be able to take the best Home Economics literature and study for themselves. We're considering forming a 'Better Homes Club' and linking up with your Junior Farmers. What do you think?"

Billy accepted the idea with encouraging enthusiasm.

"That's why it seems that the social part of it should be started under some direction. Do the boys skate?"

"I'm afraid a lot of them don't. I never thought of such a thing until I left here."

"I'm going to teach some of the girls on the pond on Saturday afternoon. If the boys were interested we could have some skating parties before we finish."

Billy spent some strenuous nights on the ice, getting the boys interested. At the end of the first week a bonfire of pine roots at the edge of the pond made the illumination for a union skating meet, a laborious exercise for some of the class, but sending everyone home with a happy anticipation for the next time. Before it was over Billy set out with Ruth to follow the creek for a few miles down through the moonlit stretches of frosted barrens. The girl skated as she did everything else, freely and easily with an expression of joy of living in every stroke. He had never seen such rhythmic, easy, independent motion in girls' athletics, and he wondered how she had acquired it.

"You must have taken to the out-doors soon after you learned to creep," he ventured.

"I imagine I was kept pretty closely under cover at that time. I know when I was seven years old people still thought I wouldn't grow up. My mother died when I was a few weeks old and a well-intentioned aunt put me into an exquisite nursery in the attic of her big house, and got an expensive nurse to take care of me, but I

just wouldn't thrive. It was a very patient and far-seeing teacher who took me to the fields and taught me to climb trees and spent nearly a whole summer overcoming my fears of the lake. Then suddenly one day I swam away from her; after that I began to live. There must be hundreds of children like that whom no one ever bothers with. Had we better go back?"

"Tired?"

"No, but I think we've come far enough."

She didn't look tired. Of all the glowing, happy, well-poised creatures under the heavens she seemed the most thoroughly alive. Billy admired the quiet control that never sickened a pleasure with satiety, that reverenced a recreation enough to stop when it had recreated. He thought of the jaded girls he had seen dragging through after-midnight dances, in rooms reeking with air so poisoned that even the lamps burned blue and flickered, and he hoped she would teach them her creed of guarding her physical womanhood as a sacred trust. He hoped she could inspire a love for the clean out of doors that seemed to leave her tingling with the fires of pure oxygen.

Even the Representative, in spite of his prejudices, fell a convert to her social propaganda, and attended with less boredom than he had anticipated the tobogganings and sleigh-rides and taffy-pulling functions. Instead of finding his young people "one hundred per cent. more of the

hoyden," he observed an unwonted dignity. He overheard a few conversations discussing landscape effects for the spring planting, and the practicability of power systems for the farms and homes of the districts. Instead of discovering his teen-age irresponsibles floundering "in the Sloughs of Sentimentality," he found a free and easy mixing of a few older people in every entertainment and none of the clandestine pairing off so general in some of their former affairs. He inquired how the parties and sleigh-rides always came to be chaperoned by some women of the neighborhood, and was informed that the girls arranged it. He marvelled that the gatherings always broke up not later than eleven o'clock, and heard from more than one mystified youth that the girls seemed to have some secret understanding; no one knew what had come over them.

On the last day of the course, when Billy returned from taking the boys to see the Aberdeen-Angus herd that had played such an important part in directing his own early interests, he found the Representative unusually worried, and interrupting his enthusiastic report of the day's proceedings with the irrelevant question:

"Have you seen Miss Macdonald to-day?"

Billy hadn't seen her.

"Well, she's got a beast of a cold, and looks like destruction," the Representative grumbled. "I wish she was out of that hotel. She never

should have been there in the first place. I'll bet the walls are fairly dripping dampness, and you probably know that when she's at home she lives in a steam-heated, electric-ventilated palace of a place, with a kind of millionaire uncle."

"I didn't know."

"Queer she should care about knocking around at a job like this."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"What would I be likely to do about it? I suppose what she needs is mustard plasters and ginger-tea. What would you suggest that we do?"

Billy stared out the window for a minute.

"I guess I'll see if she'll come home with me and let my mother fix her up," he said.

The Representative contemplated the back of his assistant's head, wisely, for a minute, then decided he was wrong. He had never in his experience with agricultural undergraduates come across so little presumption and so much cool initiative. It made a puzzling combination.

Ruth heard his suggestion with surprised gratitude. "It's just the most ordinary kind of a farm house," he apologized, "but I think it would be more comfortable and a lot safer than staying another night at the hotel."

She wasn't afraid of the farm house, but she hesitated at the imposition; she wasn't accustomed to such consideration. She also realized her danger, and it decided her.

Of the several things in Billy's later career that had heightened his mother's hopes for him, this was the crowning event, and in the whole of her orphaned life Ruth had never known so well how much she missed in not having a mother of her own. She felt no homesickness for her uncle's luxurious house and her aunt's efficient, methodical ministrations. She liked to lie in the deep feather bed with a flannel-wrapped hot brick at her feet; and she liked to have Billy's mother coming to see how she was getting on and staying to regret that he hadn't brought her sooner; and she liked the strong, nippy sweetness of her black currant drinks, even the warmth of her mustard plasters—and she *loved* the mother herself.

Somehow Mary knew it, and was happy. She supposed she would have liked any girl Billy had brought home—certainly she would have tried. But such a girl! She had always treasured the hope that sometime there would be such a one, serious, and wise, and considerate—a girl who would sort of take his mother's place for a man when she had gone.

She confided the hope to Billy while they watched the fire the next night, and Ruth was probably having dinner in her uncle's house with no trace of her cold left other than an inconvenient red square on her chest that interfered with wearing the regulation dinner-gown. He

looked up surprised. He stretched his imagination for some time, but he couldn't picture Marjorie Evison in any such capacity at all; neither could he see why any man would want such a thing. He was still pretty young.

CHAPTER VII.

With the unfolding of the willow-buds at the edge of the marshes, and the high, warm sun piercing the March winds, came a change to the Swamp Farm. When every growing thing was stirring into life, happy in its blindness to the rigors of seed-time and harvest and the burdens incident to its later family life, Mary found that her battle was nearing the end. The world was very dear to her too; the oldest and most enduring of human hopes, the possibilities of her children, was beginning to promise the things she had dreamed of—and she wanted to live. But one day she crumpled up like a wilted leaf over a dress she was making for Jean's commencement, and Billy put her to bed and 'phoned the specialist.

"There's nothing I can do," was the hopeless response.

"There must be. I'll meet you," came back over the wires in a voice sharp and hard. And the specialist came.

It was Billy's first experience of coming up against a situation where he was absolutely powerless. He blamed himself that he had been too blind to see it coming, that he had ever left

her to take alone the hardships and worries that made such a large part of the life of the desolate place. He unburdened these confessions to the specialist with shame and bitterness.

"It wouldn't have made any difference," the doctor said, "and there's nothing you can do now, except to make the waiting easier. I'm just as helpless as you are. It was too late to do anything even when she came to me first. To have saved her I should have been here years ago, when her last child was born."

Billy went back to the day whose details would always haunt him, when his angry little soul had cried out against it all—but there was no room for the bitterness in his heart now—only a cold, gripping dread, a dread for her, for the suffering and the heart-break of the leave-taking. The thought of going out was something that, in his own young, physical courage, he could not take philosophically.

"Will she suffer?" he asked.

"The worst of her suffering is over. Kept it hidden pretty bravely, hasn't she?"

"Does she know?"

"She knew when she left my office that it couldn't be very long. She hasn't let it shake her grip of herself yet, and she won't. After all, there comes a time when none of us can hold life for a minute; the one thing we can do, is to make

it as good as we can for the people we live with while we have them."

And then the old troublesome hate came back savagely. Billy knew that as long as he lived he would have hard memories to fight. When he was alone he waited miserably outside the room wondering how he could go to her, but as usual she understood and called him.

"I just wondered," she said, "if you would take Jean's dress to the dressmaker, so she can have it finished in time. I think I'd better not try to sew for a while, and I wouldn't like her to be disappointed."

So the days went on without a word of what was to come. Auntie Brown took up her residence in the house. Dan accepted the situation with stoical resignation while he was at home. He couldn't feel that it was as serious as the rest supposed, but he made an unprecedented attempt at kindness. In spite of his assumed optimism, he had a sinking feeling that something which had contributed indispensably to the background of his life was going to be taken away, and the whole picture would be thrown out of balance. He kept away from home a little more than usual, explaining to his friends in pathetic lapses of despondency that he had to get away to get his mind off things.

But Billy stayed at home constantly. He could always be found within call of the house, and

notwithstanding his young terror of the inevitable, managed to maintain the kindest sort of cheerfulness in his mother's presence.

Her own fortitude puzzled him. Here and there she dropped many little suggestions for the years to come, but she never spoke of leaving them. Then one day she gave him her philosophy, pointing it out to him on the worn page of a Bible —*"If thou hast run with the footmen and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? And if in the land of peace wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?"*

Billy had never heard the quotation. It struck him as pretty strong thinking, a real man's philosophy for every day living—something he wouldn't have expected to find in the Bible. He handed the book back soberly, but without a word; he didn't know what to say. He was not sufficiently sure of the theories so popular with students making their elementary dip into the sciences, to be irreverent, but the Bible opened for discussion on week days embarrassed him.

His mother watched him anxiously, then taking courage said:

"You won't think I'm preaching to you? I know I can't understand how a young man looks at things, and I'm not questioning how you feel —but I just hope you'll think about it. You've had a lot of hard things already; there may be more

ahead, and I'm afraid for you—not that I think you'd fail where any other man wouldn't. I feel very safe about you in things that most mothers have to worry about—but it's too hard for any one to hold out alone. You'll think about it?"

Billy turned down the leaf by way of assurance. It was the best he had to offer.

A few days later she left them. The turn came suddenly. A nurse was brought down from the city, and with this professional help in charge Dan said good-bye awkwardly each morning and drove off; the strain of things at home made him nervous. It was Billy who stayed day and night within hearing of the room, whose awkward boyish care astonished the nurse with its gentleness and forethought, and it was Billy who steadied the spent, trembling soul in its last great weariness.

All day he had watched the tired eyes closing wearily, only to return with troubled anxiety to Jean, and he had always assured her that he would not forget her plans for the little sister. Then, as the mists began to come over, she looked up again, with an effort, searching for something.

"What is it?" he whispered.

"Where—is your father?"

It was the old, human cry of loneliness, and Billy realized as he had never done before what she had been starving for through all the years. Whatever Dan might be to anyone else, to her

he was the person she had lived for first; she wanted him now and no one knew where to find him. Unless by chance he returned in the next few minutes it would be too late. Even now, when he had not considered the hours precious enough to wait with her, she was anticipating his need of her, thinking ahead for him, with the pure maternal love that rises above personal considerations. Painfully she left her last request with Billy.

"You'll try to forget . . . to think of him as I do?"

And Billy promised. He would have promised anything, and having made a promise he knew he would keep it, whether it seemed impossible now or not.

Then the frail little form settled down close against him, and with the weariness of a hard day ended, the last light flickered and went out.

Three days later, when it was all over, and they had come back to the empty house, when Jean had cried herself to sleep and Billy could go out alone to think, Ruth Macdonald came. She had seen the announcement and had come at once, but when she reached the churchyard everyone had gone, so she came to the house and found Billy alone behind the mat of vines screening the little wooden porch. There was a hardness in his set face, the traces of a fierce battle going on

inside. He was still trying to overcome the hate that possessed him.

"It isn't that she had to go," he said, bitterly; "it's the kind of life she had."

Ruth didn't say anything. She looked away for a while, then she looked back, and there was a compassion in her misty eyes that Billy had never hoped to receive again, since his mother had gone. And somehow the hardness toward his father and life in general began to melt. He leaned against the wooden rail with his face covered, and Ruth listened silently to the dryest, hardest sobs she had ever heard, listened until it wasn't in her nature to wait any longer. For the hour he was only a broken-hearted boy and the mother instinct was strong in her. She bent over him as she would to comfort a suffering child, and ran her slim, supple hand through his hair. And because Billy couldn't speak just then he covered the hand with his own and held it there to show his gratitude. Beyond that he was unmoved, but the girl was startled by a quick, hot rush through her young body. She wormed her hand loose and looked over the fields for a minute away from his stare of bewilderment. After that she was herself again. But long after Billy was asleep that night she lay awake, trying to smother in her pillow a torrent of hard, racking little sounds that would not be kept back.

CHAPTER VIII

"We are so often ashamed of the earth—the soil of it, the sweat of it, the good common coarseness. To us in our fine raiment and soft manners it seems indelicate. Bring out your social remedies! They will fail, they will fail every one until each man has his feet somewhere upon the soil."—David Grayson.

How pitifully the compass of our lives is played with by the most wanton little winds. When Billy finished college he did not have to grope through the indecision of finding his work; he knew he was a farmer. The conviction was verified one day when, rounding a bend in a drive through a pine-woods country, he felt his pulses bound at the sudden picture of a beautiful stretch of tilled land. It was in the first intoxicating days of spring when the promise of the year is likely to play tricks with our optimism, but the spring never elated him any more. With the breath of the first white thorn blossoms came the memory of another year when their perfume had blown in through the open window of the little Swamp Farm house where his mother waited; and a wonderful quiet possessed him; the old hardness had almost gone. On the day when he had fought his first hard battle with himself, and sobbed out the agony at last, the breaking up had started, and when his father turned to

the road after selling the farm and nailing up the empty house Billy felt a genuine pity for him. Jean had been sent back to school and would soon be ready to teach, but he regretted seriously the loss of a home for her. This was another pressing argument for getting a farm of his own.

It was a beautiful stretch of land at the end of a timbered road, a lonely place, generally considered, but Billy went over it acre by acre with glowing anticipation. Here he would start a permanent pasture for the long dreamed of Aberdeen-Angus herd. Down where the broad creek took such a precipitous leap in its course, he would build a dam and drive the water to the buildings—perhaps install a dynamo later on. The glinting blue stones from the rough little rise back of the barn would make the foundation and fireplace and chimneys for a low Swiss chalet among the trees. He could already see its light blinking down on the highway like a beacon, the welcome to a shelter and resting place where he could dream and hope, blessed with the happy content of having paid his debt to existence through the day.

Billy confided to a classmate, the Jimmy Wood who had piloted him to the brink of his first college social adventure, his plan to buy the place and work it, and Jimmy was disappointed.

"Have you stopped to think what you're letting yourself in for?" he asked. "You've done

farm work at home, and I'll warrant you've hated it, but after four years away from it you'll find it a sight worse—the dirt and the drudgery and the eternal monotony. Of course, you'd get used to it. At the end of a year I dare say you'd be content to wear overalls and a six days' beard from Sunday to Sunday. I know we've all said we wanted to farm eventually, but not the grubbing, driving, scraping kind of a job that goes with paying for a place. Better make your money at something else and end up with farming as a hobby, when you can afford to be merely business manager yourself. If you start in now with nothing ahead, and have to save every cent, you'll get so absorbed in yourself, so haunted by the bogey of your mortgage, that by the time you should be some force in the community philanthropically, you'll be sealed like a clam in the money-getting idea."

"You mean, then, that the only public-spirited agriculturist is the man who makes his money some easier, faster way, and comes back to donate it here and there for rural uplift, who cultivates a hobby of making speeches on the calamity of rural depopulation?"

"Oh, I know my view of it seems sordid enough," Jimmy admitted, "but you're an idealist. And I can tell you there's no way you'll lose your vision more surely than in a mill with poverty. Besides, if I'm not uncommonly dense

you've set your heart on that place because you want to build a home on it; you know as well as I do, that a farm's the lonesomest place on earth to go to alone. A man can navigate fairly easily on a single craft anywhere else; he can stop to think whether he can afford a wife and a home or not, and he can wait until he can afford them, but a wife and a home are almost an absolute necessity for a man who owns and works a farm, poor or not. Being an idealist you don't want anything but the best, and I've observed that the best is generally expensive."

Billy still seemed absorbed in the skyline and his adviser feared that he might have gone too far. He knew that if Billy's decision had been made, it had no doubt stood arguments quite as enduring as any he could advance, and it wasn't likely to help things, to remind him of the disadvantages.

"Of course," Jimmy continued. "I haven't any fear that you'd make a mess of things, and I know there are compensations, but suppose you do go back and bury yourself there now, you cut yourself off from everything social at least, and I'm afraid you'll just wall yourself in alone for the rest of your life. On the other hand, you have your choice of two of the best counties in the province for Rep. work. The job has a few allurements apart from the salary, and that reminds me——"

From a collection of letters of various post marks and hand-writing, and sundry photographs, Jimmy produced a snapshot and handed it to Billy. It gave him a wicked satisfaction to see the dull red slowly cover the sober face, for the picture showed nothing more disturbing than Marjorie Evison perched nymph-like on the limb of a blossoming apple-tree. Billy looked for a long time with the same unconscious worship that had followed the airy little figure through the college dance; then he handed the picture back.

"You can have that," Jimmy offered magnanimously.

Billy stared in amazement. "Don't you want it?" he asked.

"Not specially."

"Where did you get it?"

"Slipped it off the mantel right under her eyes."

Billy looked at the picture again with the same quiet gravity.

"Guess it doesn't belong to either of us," he decided, and carefully held it over the fire until the flames covered it.

Jimmy had not enjoyed such an interesting bit of drama for a long time. He also congratulated himself as a rather successful diplomat.

"I suppose you know you have a chance of the office in her county?" he remarked incidentally. "What are you going to do about it?"

Billy didn't say definitely what he intended to do about it. That night he stood at his window for a long time in the dark and looked out over the roofs of the city, massed off in dark, blurry squares with the street lights stretching between like ropes of toy electric globes strung along a circus midway. Very confining it seemed to his country-bred instincts, while beyond the last flickering lamp in some laborer's cottage, the moist brown earth stretched for miles and miles in limitless freedom. A thin white mist rose from it now like incense from the hearth of the god of production. It was the wonderful season of beginnings on the farm, birth and promise everywhere—the eternal old mother pulsing with the first life of the bursting seed, warm, yellow beaks chipping their shells, wobbly-legged colts blinking at the light of day, and weak, trembly, clamorous lambs needing the tenderest care of all, and so few people with the right human instinct to look after them.

A passionate hunger for the land possessed him. Beyond the pine-covered hills lay the place he had set his heart on. It would take a long time to work it into the Eldorado it promised, and his restive young muscles ached to get at it. There would be two or three years of the grindingest kind of work, then returns would begin to come in. The quaint Swiss chalet with its low stone wall and chimney would go up among the

trees, and its light blink down through their shelter on the highway at night as he had pictured it for years. There would still be an abundance of man-size tasks to do, and worries to handle, and debts to meet; the same fields would call him to work every day, but there would be the cabin to come back to at night to dream and to love.

As usual his arguments brought him back in a circle. Of course Jimmy had been right in thinking the farm was the loneliest place in the world to go to alone, and of course, whatever Jimmy or anyone else thought, the dreams of the little house were all inspired by a vision that had hovered never far from the surface of his consciousness since it startled him out of his boyhood a few years before. As is usual with idealistic natures, he had endowed his idol with every grace he worshipped; it was strengthened and purified as his experience broadened, until no one else would ever have recognized it as belonging to the silky little kitten of a maid who handled her playthings with such soft-pawed heartlessness. The longer he stayed away from her the more she seemed set apart in a world of other interests and other friends. Now the opportunity had come to live in the same community, and while there were moments when the prospect rather terrified him, it never occurred to him to let it pass. He still wanted the farm,

but the farm could wait; the human, jealous fear of losing her stamped out every other ambition. So it came about that the next few weeks found him moving into the county agricultural office.

The work habit is a powerful saving force to tide us sanely over periods of distracting interests. When Billy took on the robes of his office he was not by any means indifferent. He owed enough personally to the Representative in his home county to appreciate the bigness of the job, and his brief experience as assistant made it easy for him to go ahead with the general routine. Against this there was a troublesome undercurrent of dissatisfaction working, a half-ashamed feeling that he was making the position a means to an end. But because he had worked all his life he began at once to dig up something to do. The more he investigated the more he found to do, and the more he found to do the more he became fired with the possibilities of achievement.

For the first week he drove all day from one school to another, distributing settings of eggs and seed potatoes, and leaving with the children such scientific information as they might apply in directing the increase thereof. In the evenings he talked late with labor-harassed farmers who came to get him to negotiate for hired men, and remained to discuss other less urgent matters. As soon as he could see a free evening

ahead, he phoned Miss Evison to ask if he might call.

He heard a dozen receivers come down while someone went to bring her, and when her voice did come over the wires the clear, smooth staccato was not reassuring. It had the ring of a woman with much business to despatch, but who hadn't yet learned the art of handling each case whole-heartedly.

"Mr. Withers?" she repeated with doubtful inflection, then, "Oh, yes, I do remember. I believe I had you confused with someone else."

This was less complimentary than puzzling, since the local papers had advertised widely the coming of the new Agricultural Representative, in one case, by some strange accident, directly following an account of Miss Evison's card party in the "society column."

She would be glad to see him, however; the difficulty was just to find an evening free. She counted over her engagements, beginning at the end of the week and working back, and decided she could give him the next evening. He came away from the interview grateful, but unhappy. Two things troubled him. When she could be so charmingly cordial, why did she ever assume that tantalizing aloofness which made a man wonder how much discomfort his attention was giving her? And why, when she must have known who he was, did she pretend to have forgotten? To

his simple standards of honesty it was disappointing. Then he reflected that he didn't understand girls—that, of course, a girl of her popularity must be bored to death with cases like his own and had a right to use her own methods of defence.

It was a maid in uniform who admitted Billy to the Evison home and ushered him into a parlor to wait for Miss Marjorie. As it was his first experience with this formality he was a little embarrassed. The room itself was not just fashioned to put any one at ease. He didn't know much about house furnishings, but he judged from its fantastic twistings and carvings that this was copied from some antique historic period. He knew also that it must have cost about as much as he would have to spend in equipping a whole house. A level shaft of warm, yellow light from the sunset came through the curtain and touched a vase of long-stemmed jonquils, but the highly cut points of the glass caught the light and splintered it into a dazzling spectrum, leaving the delicate beauty of the flowers pale and lifeless.

Somehow the picture remained strangely in his mind when Marjorie came. There was something dazzling about her, just as there had been when she played a local magnet in the college ballroom, and it seemed to outshine the natural girlish sweetness which by reason of his own

ideals and his lover's interpretation of a few of her passing moods had grown into his thoughts of her. She greeted him with the assured graciousness cultivated of constant social experience that he knew nothing about. He was frankly embarrassed and he didn't care. Weighed against her cool indifference, it seemed to save a remnant of reality in his dream.

The April evening out of doors was inviting. The night air was sweet with the perfume of budding orchards, the roads for miles around were smooth and damp, and the Department of Agriculture car was at their service. Billy considered her dress, doubtfully; very pretty it was, sheer and white, with little blue flowers sprinkled over it; very short, like a little girl's, showing white silk stockings dotted with the same blue flowers.

"I just wondered," he ventured, "if you'd care to wrap up and come for a drive?"

Her composure left her instantly. She drew in her breath in childish anticipation.

"Down to the city?" she asked. "I haven't been there for ages. They're playing The Follies to-night. Do you think we'd be in time if we hurried?"

A few minutes later she ran downstairs in her motoring outfit, followed by her mother. She was very proud of her mother, because, impressed by the striking resemblance, people always

thought, "Just like the daughter will be twenty years from now." She was very pretty, willowy and girlish with a youthfulness that told of painstaking preservation, effusively gracious, in a subtly superior way, years of social practice in the same groove having equipped her with a supply of stock-phrases ready to be tripped off glibly to any occasion.

"You'll take good care of our little girl?" she said. "She doesn't make a practice of running off like this unchaperoned, but we want her to have a good time and it's really very dull for her here. Since Mr. Evison got the farming bug he has become a hopeless recluse. He runs out to the farm almost every day, and I tell him he'll soon be driving his own pigs in to the market." She laughed gaily at the idea, a silvery little descending scale, and Billy wondered why she should have bothered for him. "You're connected with the Farmers' Institute or something here yourself, aren't you?" she continued.

Billy explained as briefly as he could what he was trying to do, and received at the end of each department, the safe comment, "How interesting!"

Of course it wasn't interesting, as he told it. There's nothing interesting about dealing out setting eggs and potatoes to school children all day, and trying to round up elusive and indifferent farm laborers at night. Personally he saw

something very much worth while beneath these externals, but weighed by her standards they shrank perceptibly. Not that he attached any importance to her judgment; only she was Marjorie's mother, and her opinion might matter a good deal.

Nature never intended a motorist to speed through the soft dusk of an April night in the country. The breath of the balm of Gilead tree, the scent of whitethorn blossoms, the rich, earthy odors from fresh-ploughed fields, were lost in a chill, damp wind driving in their faces; the blurry outlines of heavily tasselled willows on the roadside, and lamplight pictures caught through the windows of farm houses—mothers bending over children at their lessons, or a late supper group where the day's work had been unusually long, all shot past like dizzy films on a crazy reel; the musical roar of high, boiling creeks, and the sleepy chirp of nesting birds were drowned in the pounding of the engine. It wasn't the hilarious joy of speeding, just the strained sitting-tight and making time. There was a rough, noisy climb up a stony hill, and the city glittered in a bowl below.

They coasted down silently, and when Billy could take his eyes from the wheel, to fairly look at the girl, he found her bright with excitement.

"I wonder if I'll see anyone I know," she said.

The play was not inspiring, to make the best

of it. This didn't matter much to Marjorie, because she had not forgotten her opera glasses, and seemed to find a wonderful interest in searching the audience. Suddenly she brought the glasses down, and directed her attention solely to Billy and the stage. Billy didn't look near the stage much; his knowledge of plays was limited, but critical, and on the night when the hope of four years had its first gift of reality, it would have seemed a prodigal waste to give his attention to stage fiction. He found quite heaven enough for the present in her nearness, the beauty of her white, regular profile, and her adorable way of leaning the merest trifle over the arm-rest between them.

When it was over, and the car was gliding quietly over the road home, she slid down snugly in the seat like a satisfied child, and he thought, with large plans for the future, how little it took to make her happy. He didn't know, of course, that the satisfaction of her evening had begun when her glasses caught the attention of a very desirable acquaintance whose interest of late seemed to require some stimulation. If she had had all gifts of the gods at her command, nothing, she reflected, could be more effective than to be seen with Billy with his good looks and the unaccountable impression he gave of "being somebody." None of her friends would know who he was, of course, and she didn't intend that

they ever should know. Altogether she had spent a very profitable evening. Then there was something very gratifying about Billy's company; he gave so much and asked so little. She was accustomed to lavish attention from other men, but none of them ever offered her the deference of a saint and the indulgence of an irresponsible child. It was an understood part of their social code that she work her resources to the limit to be entertaining, that she make the most of her beauty, that she play the game for what it was worth. With this she had an easier trick of her own—to set them off against each other through the gentle art of inviting opposition.

The balmy softness of the evening had gone and the air held the chill of midnight. The lights were out in the houses except an occasional night-burning lamp turned low in a kitchen. They saw one bent, white-bearded old man with a lantern coming from the barn, presumably making his anxious nightly rounds to the sheep-fold during lambing time. Marjorie roused from her reverie and shivered a little.

"How terribly lonesome," she said. "I don't know how they stand it to live here all the time, but I suppose some people are made for that sort of thing."

"I suppose so. I'd rather farm than anything else."

"You would? Of course you mean to manage

a farm, or to advise other people like you're doing now. That's different."

Billy smiled.

"You don't advise people much at this job," he said. "You just try to get the community in line with whatever service the Department of Agriculture (which is their own) has to give them." And then because he didn't want her to have any illusions as to the dignity of his work he outlined in detail some of its humblest phases.

"How very funny," she laughed. "You must be very much amused sometimes, but it must be an awful bore, too, dealing with that class of people day after day. Someone's generally at home at our house. I know you'd like Dad and I hope we'll see heaps of you."

"That's very kind," he said, genuinely grateful, "but I didn't mean that I find it tiresome at all. You see it's different when you've always been a farmer yourself, and I'd like to go back to real practical farming on a place of my own."

"Yes?" she inquired, beginning to get his viewpoint. "I know a girl friend of mine—and they're very nice people—they have a farm that they live on the year round, and all summer her father wears a white suit and goes right out among the men."

Then Billy must have touched something, for the car shot out suddenly, and they didn't discuss things agricultural any more. He had about decided that the case was hopeless.

The lights were still bright in the house when they drove up, but she led him around to a side door opening into her own little sitting-room. Someone had just kindled a fire on the hearth, and slipping out of her coat she dropped down on a stool. Billy looked down at her with a tenderness that he wouldn't have dared to let her see, then his eyes wandered to a few of the room's features that clamored for attention.

It was decidedly a girl's sanctum. The one soft-shaded light was turned low, but the flickering blaze from the fire showed the walls gay with pennants. On the mantel, the little French writing-desk, and here and there in odd spaces on the walls were photographs; she seemed to have a preference for college graduates in gown and sheep-skin and the smiling assurance that usually goes with a degree before experience has tested its infallibility as a talisman. On a table in the centre of the room, a vase of tall American Beauties served, no doubt, to keep green the memory of some very ardent or wealthy admirer.

A less prejudiced person might have seen in the collection of trophies something in common with the scalps decorating the walls of an Indian tepee, but to Billy it only emphasized his infinitesimal place in her world. There was something very sober and kind in his eyes when they came back again to the thoughtful face with its starry eyes and childish, pursed-up mouth and

the mysterious touch that comes from the glow and shadows of the firelight. He thought how sweet and becoming this seriousness was, compared with her lighter, irresponsible moods, and he looked ahead to the time when life would have taught her more of its meaning. Then the little Swiss clock chimed out twelve and he came to apologetically.

"When may I see you again?" he asked.

She drew her brows together and counted on her fingers a list of engagements for a week.

"You'd better call me up," she said. "I'm never sure of what I want to do for a day ahead."

It was the beginning of many such evenings, distracting, uncertain, alluring but promising nothing, and the agricultural office suffered accordingly.

CHAPTER IX.

Very often, in planning his trips to examine the children's school gardens, Billy arranged an itinerary touching the neighborhood of the Evison home, and took Marjorie with him. Very gay little picnics they had. A bank of violets or a nest of young robins never failed to move the girl to ecstasies. They generally stripped the bank of its flowers and she carried them away, withering, laced through her hair and knotted about her dress; and it took a great deal of moral support to keep her from taking the young robins out in her hand to feel the softness of their feathers.

"That's the way I love things," she pouted when Billy had warned her of the subsequent fate of the birds if she touched them. "If I want a thing I *want* it. Life must be very easy for you cool, slow-feeling people who can sort of stop and calculate before you know whether you really care about a thing or not."

If the picnicking did claim undue importance and time in the garden examining, it did not save her from getting a few glimpses of the sterner phases of country life. In the middle of one hot July afternoon they drove up to a farm

home and found the woman bringing in lines and lines of fresh-smelling clothes. She had done the washing herself that morning and judging from the shine and order of her kitchen she had done several other things besides. She wasn't dressed in any regulation afternoon costume; her gingham dress was turned in low at the neck and the sleeves rolled back at the elbows. A few little damp tendrils of hair cropped out from under her sun hat. She was thin and tanned and a little tired looking, but something about her gave a wholesome impression of health, happiness and usefulness. A perfect little Sandow of a boy a year or so old slept on the porch in a crib canopied over with mosquito netting, and two others in blue overalls hung shyly in the background.

Marjorie was surprised at the dignified kindness of the woman's greeting. She wasn't at all embarrassed to be found taking in her washing, but she put her basket down and gave her attention entirely to her visitors.

"I'll take Miss Evison in where it's cooler," she said to Billy, "and when the boys have taken you over their garden they have something to show you in the house."

The feature of interest in the house was a big velvety cycopia moth, clinging sleepily to the

curtain—one of the rarest of Nature's beautiful creations.

"Their father found the cocoon on a peach tree," the mother explained, "and we have all been watching it ever since. They're learning a lot from their gardens and chickens and explorations of the fields, that will give them a clearer view of things when the time comes for them to need it. Never a day goes now but I thank God that I am allowed to have my boys grow up on a farm."

"I didn't expect to find her like that," Marjorie remarked when they left her, "so perfectly at ease and so sure of herself. She isn't the average type of farm woman is she?"

"There isn't any average type of farm woman," Billy exclaimed. "They have the most individuality, are the least run in a conventional mould, of any class of women I know. This Mrs. Burns was a trained nurse before she was married. There are a dozen others just as fine and capable scattered through the neighborhood. The community doesn't know much about them because they're so everlastingly busy they can't get away from home much."

"Can't they get help, or don't they want to spend the money?"

"Some of them could afford help, but you can't get a girl to work in the country. The city offers them good wages, and most of them have

an exaggerated idea of the inconvenience of a farm house from a woman's standpoint. Naturally a girl prefers to work in a house where the water comes hot or cold from a faucet in an enamel sink, instead of where it has to be carried from a pump in the yard, where the washing is done with a power machine or sent to the laundry instead of being scrubbed out on a little zinc washboard, and a hundred other details that make the farm undesirable for a city girl."

"And the lonesomeness of it! A girl who had lived in town would find it maddening."

"But women like Mrs. Burns don't find it lonely. They have grown up with country ideas, and they have a great deal in themselves—they can make their own entertainment; then they have a live interest in their homes and families, and the men in this community are generally a pretty fine lot."

"Then why don't they make things different for their wives?"

"Naturally that's the first question a person would ask. Some of them don't seem to care much, I'll admit. A lot of them, though, are ambitious to have the very best things for their homes, but there are two hard rocks in the way. In the first place most farms don't pay well enough to install big improvements and not many farmers know how to put in a low-cost equipment. Practically every farm that pays its way

at all could afford the essential conveniences, and with labor as it is now, it looks as though power of some kind would soon become an economic necessity. Then, we may see lots of improvements. There's enough water-power going to waste in this country to supply every farm with electricity, but I guess we farmers will always have to fight the sin of conservatism."

Marjorie settled back in her corner of the seat. She was ready to drop the subject for something more interesting.

"And yet," she said, laughing at him through half closed eyes, "you want to be a farmer. Your poor wife!"

Billy looked hard at the road ahead. "It wouldn't be a very alluring prospect, would it?" he agreed.

For several nights after this the light burned late in the Agricultural Office, and curious sentinels of neighborhood affairs speculated on reasons for the strange behaviour of "the agricultural fellow" during the day. On several occasions he had been seen patrolling the creeks which wound like threads of a spider's web through the hollows of the rolling land. He always carried an armful of boards and a saw and appeared to be measuring the width of the streams.

"Mebby surveyin' for an irrigatin' system," one of the village store roosters suggested.

When Billy had satisfied himself as to the resources at hand, and his search for technical data had about exhausted the patience of the engineers within reach, he succeeded in getting some twenty farmers to meet in the agricultural office one evening to discuss harnessing and putting to work the water-power in the district. He pointed out how the sight of a dozen young horses running wild in his pastures would impress the average farmer as an awful example of horse-power going to waste, how he would spend a good deal of time and effort and money if necessary to capture a horse-power or two for his own use; while there may be five, ten or twenty horse-power running to waste in the brook that waters his meadows, but he is not inspired with any desire to possess and harness that.

He explained his strange conduct of the past two weeks when he had followed the streams of the district for miles, measuring their flow with a weir, and he gave the results of his prospecting. He told them that every four thousand gallons of water falling one foot in one minute, or every four hundred gallons falling ten feet in one minute meant the power of one horse going to waste; that one water horse-power would furnish light for the average farm; that five water horse-power would furnish light and power for both the barn and the house. He estimated that the cost of installing a five water horse-power would

not exceed the cost of one young horse, and that it would have paid for itself in saving wages, by the time the horse was ready to die.

He didn't expect the men to be carried away by his enthusiasm, and they weren't. A power system of any kind was a novelty in the section. An itinerant gasoline engine made its rounds every winter to cut the year's wood, but no one had ventured to adapt even gasoline to any farm work. Naturally, they were skeptical of the energy stored up in their quiet little creeks. Billy knew that the only hope of converting them rested in demonstrating just what a power system could be made to do, and beyond the pine woods, neighboring with the farm he had hoped to own, was a place where a stream from the hills ran everything that had formerly turned with a crank. He could arrange an excursion to the place. He could have the engineer who had gone over the ground here come out and explain just how the same principle could be carried out at home. He could get manufacturers to bring special pieces of equipment and demonstrate their uses. And in order that the scheme might not miss its main objective—to show Miss Evison that a farm home could be made a livable place—he would arrange with the owner and his wife to let him put on a demonstration of a complete home equipment. In the last undertaking his zeal was considerably in excess of his ability

to handle the case. He wrote to ask Ruth Macdonald if she would come and help him.

Ruth said she would come; somehow people always expected that when they went to her for help. Besides, it was part of her professional work. She spent some days consulting with dealers in household equipment, from bath-tubs to wash-boards, and finally got together a collection to fit the needs of any ordinary farm-house. The evening before the day of the demonstration she followed her shipment out to the farm, partly because the work ahead of her would require the thrifty precaution known in country lore as "taking the morning by the forelock," partly because she wanted to feel again the spell of the moonlight flooding into the room, and the night stirred so little by a breath among the leaves and the distant gurgle of the creek, that she could hardly sleep for the stillness.

She awakened early next morning, to the sound of carefully handled dishes in the kitchen, and the drone of a cream separator in some distant annex of the house. The early October sun was flooding the mists from the fields; a scattered drove of young cattle on the crown of a hill moved like black silhouettes against the blaze. A tingling buoyancy came from looking out over miles of open country and breathing long, dizzy breaths of autumn-scented air, while down in the city the great human herd still slept,

catching whatever faint little whiffs drifted in between brick walls. Field after field bristling with yellow stubble told of a harvest gathered in, but the orchards were still heavy with apples, their bright red glowing through a glittering coat of the night's frost. Here and there a corduroy of black furrows showed where the farmer was already taking thought for next spring's sowing. Everywhere there was evidence of productive work completed and the urgent call of other work to do; to the born farmer there could be no monotony in the changing seasons. Every morning in town she saw swarms of workers like herself return to their day labors like bees to a hive, each passing mechanically to its own little cell, pigeon-holed somewhere in the make-up of an office building.

She had sometimes thought the lives of women in the country narrow and drab-visioned, but here in the kitchen the farm mother was singing quietly to herself as she cooked her family's breakfast. She was no mechanical cog in the machinery of the place; she planned and directed and created every day. Under the window her dahlias were blooming gloriously. In the orchard a flock of her turkeys were getting ready for the Thanksgiving market. Overhead was coming the soft thud of her baby's bare feet on the stairs. On a hill off among the pines a red maple flamed at the door of a crumbling house—an ideal site for a Swiss chalet, Billy had called it one day

when his enthusiasm had run away with his reserve—and she thought wretchedly of her office with its soft red rug, and its one gloomy window, and of her uncle's luxurious house where hired experts held the sole privilege of ministering to the family comfort.

However, she had a clear field for working out her own ideas to-day. The house was a roomy, old-fashioned, hospitable place which had made a home for two generations and might yet be the pride of a third. The family had spent a good deal of money in redecorating and refurnishing it as fashions changed or things wore out, and when the stream from the hill was harnessed to furnish power for every machine in the barn, the house was trigged out with a dazzling array of electric lights. Apart from this, the returning ghost of a great-grandfather would not have noticed anything new enough to arouse his curiosity. One look into the barn with its whirring motors, and general hum of activity—everything from the grindstone to the grain chopper turning without a crank and all going at once—would have sent the apparition scurrying back to more primitive quarters.

Some of the women excursionists at the farm that afternoon seemed to be possessed of the same instinct. They clutched at their children when they saw them getting within reach of the electric washer. A few were even afraid to touch it

themselves for fear of a shock. When it was suggested that where electricity was not available any ordinary washer could be driven by a little portable gasoline engine about the size of a lawn mower, they immediately had a presentiment of being caught in the belt. The simplest arrangement demonstrated was the connecting of a water-power machine to the tap in the kitchen sink, but half of the houses in the neighborhood didn't have kitchen sinks or any water supply other than a pump in the back yard and a rain barrel under the eaves.

The women unanimously agreed that what they wanted most was running water in the house. With a set of little models the girl showed how this could begin with a soft water cistern and a pump plying into a kitchen sink. The next improvement would be a water front on the kitchen range and a hot water faucet, and these would lead directly to a complete bath-room. Even without electricity or any other form of power, a hand force-pump in the cellar could give a water supply for a bath-room.

A genuine interest was kindled when the people began to handle the equipment themselves. The men were not the least interested; those to whom a vacuum cleaner was a new piece of machinery investigated its mechanism with the enthusiasm of a boy with a new engine. They began to real-

ize why the family doctor sometimes condemned the straining, twisting motion that goes with sweeping, even though their mothers had lived long and used brooms. Those of a mechanical bent took up the toy dumb-waiter with interest; they didn't resent being told that every time a woman took a step up in climbing a stair she had to actually lift her own weight—a waste of energy which they overcame in their own work by fitting their barns with feed-chutes and litter-carriers. They even listened with some show of interest to the fact that most of the tuberculosis in the country was due to such poor methods of heating the houses that the windows of sleeping rooms must be kept closed all winter to keep from freezing, and they discussed cost, and advantages of hot air and steam heating systems. Women took up the electric iron, gingerly at first, then freely to test the speed and ease of pressing out clothes with an iron always hot and clean—without fires to keep up, or constant trips to and from the stove. One weary little mother had eyes for nothing but the kiddie-koop, a little screened box on wheels where her baby could play safe and happy always near her, but out of her way, while she cooked meals for a raft of hired men.

After a general discussion, they planned a simple and practical equipment for an average farm house. Then they estimated the cost, and

the practicability of the whole scheme began to waver. In view of the yearly income derived from the average farm, most of the men decided that no farmer could afford to put so much money into an unproductive investment. Their wives generally agreed with them. The farm mortgage is as much a nightmare to a woman as it is to her husband; she is willing to wait for everything until the place is clear, and the most of her life has gone; then, if they still want it, they can afford a most comfortable home to die in. Many parents argued that they had to look ahead if they were going to give their boys a start on farms of their own, but those of wider vision believed that the whole scheme of family life falls down if the home suffers; that it does not pay to build the farm up into a profitable property which is despised by the very children for whom they are giving their lives. Even the most doubtful showed some amusement at the announcement that every essential convenience could be installed in an ordinary farm house for less than the cost of a farm car—and even the poorest of them owned a car.

Late in the afternoon Marjorie Evison and her mother called, as they had promised. For the sake of Mr. Evison's business they made it a matter of principle to patronize all agricultural movements. They had never known the need of things that were novelties in most farm homes,

and could not grasp the significance of the array of washing machines, mops and what not strewn about the big kitchen, but they had time to talk to Ruth for a few minutes—to regret that they couldn't entertain her at tea, as they were due at a corn roast at the Country Club—and they congratulated Billy on the originality of the idea and hoped they would see more of him now.

Billy had planned to find a spare hour during the day to take Marjorie up to the place on the hill. It was very beautiful now with the maples turning crimson and the sleepy countryside for miles below basking in the sun, making a picture blurred and softened through the purple haze. He wanted to search her face when she saw the wonder and promise of it all for the first time—to try to learn whether it would ever be possible to make her like it. But somehow things had gone wrong; he decided that this was not the right day to try to convert her to the gospel of country life. When she arrived he was standing in the middle of the stream, explaining the mechanics of the water-motor to a group of men. He was blissfully unconscious of how his muddy hip boots, and collarless shirt with here and there a smudge of machine oil, might appear to a girl who never saw men of her own social strata in any outdoor apparel less elegant than white tennis flannels. He didn't know that his unconcerned appearance as he was seemed almost like

effrontery. She might have even admired it in some novel hero engineer hewing a railroad through a mountain, but there was nothing romantic about this; it was just grovelling in a muddy stream to show some two dozen farmers how a wheel went round; it was just the dirt and soil of farming and he seemed to like it. She found herself comparing him with the leisurely, polished men of her own little *coterie,* and she decided that she liked clean men. She was also unusually indifferent to-day on account of the event at the Country Club. It was the recognized social centre for urbanites who from choice or necessity had stranded themselves on the dead sands of rural life. They frequently entertained very smart people from town, and Mrs. Evison, with a mother's ambition, and a social expert's diplomacy, looked upon it is the one chance in this isolated place, through which she could give her daughter "opportunities."

The Evisons didn't want to separate themselves literally from the neighborhood social life, of course; they would try to drop in for a few minutes at every community gathering, and they would give their grounds for garden parties and use whatever other advantage they possessed for the good of "the people," but it was not to be expected that just because they were back-to-the-landers they should be satisfied with the company of people of entirely different social interests.

This agricultural young man who had filled in so nicely to give Marjorie a good time, who was so safe and unpresuming, had always seemed rather superior, probably on account of his college experience. He had always refused to be considered anything but a farmer and they had laughed at him, but to-day, dirty and dishevelled, he looked it. They must hurry on. And Billy watched the scarlet blur of a girl's motor coat until the long grey car carried it out of sight; then he returned to his water wheel. The shadows were already darkening over the dream place on the hill.

The people went away interested. An agent or two who had hovered tirelessly about the place all day, succeeded, in spite of government regulations, in taking a few orders for their goods on exhibition, and Billy was satisfied with the day's work. He knew that if one improvement came into actual use in the district others would follow. When the last car had gone he had a scrub up at the spring, made the best of his disordered appearance and went to the house to find Ruth. Notwithstanding the success of the day's proceedings he had a heavy sense of disappointment. After all, the whole scheme had been inspired by a personal object, and that had failed. To-morrow he would be able to think of some new tack, of course, but to-night he welcomed the buoyant philosophy and sympathetic interest that always seemed to go with Ruth.

He found her in the kitchen helping the farmer's wife with the supper. It was a repast fitting a day's strenuous work out of doors—a great iron kettle of sizzling fried potatoes, a cold roast chicken reserved from the weekly market supply, a platter piled with steaming ears of corn, and deep, brown-skinned pumpkin pies. The doors were open and a crackling wood fire warmed the frost-edged air of the October evening. He found an old instinct stirred strangely by something in the genuine home atmosphere of the place. He couldn't tell whether it was the motherly air of the woman who directed things, or the way the littlest sleepy towhead burrowed into his father's shoulder, or whether the spell was partly due to the rose-shaded light falling about the girl with her silky, dark hair and glowing eyes. They were not at all practised in magnetic arts, those eyes; they were just frank and kind and happy and rather beautiful, he thought—the light might have been responsible. He had a boyish desire to tell her what troubled him—not definitely, of course; he had a masculine, cautious dislike of personalities, but if he could give her the abstract problem, he might at least get the benefit of a woman's viewpoint. He had to take her to the station that night and he would drive around by the hill.

The mountain road was beautifully winding. For a stretch the trees arched over, leaving it cut like a black tunnel through the woods; then the rocks shot up a steep wall on one side and on the other a rain-washed slope ran down to a level of flat, tilled fields. At the crown of the hill the woods ended and a plateau of cleared land marked the beginning of the farm.

The car stopped abruptly.

"Do you know," Billy began with animation, "I've always thought I'd like to own this place. What do you think of it? I've gone over every foot of it and I know it's a good investment—that it would give a good living at least. Do you think it could ever be made a good place to live?"

Ruth looked at the crumbling house with its background of old trees. She remembered how the maple had flamed in the sun when she saw it from her window that morning. Now with the shadows lying sharp and black on the frosted grass and the moonlight filtering through the branches, it seemed to stand waiting for something to shelter and protect—rather a curious old sentinel too; wondering just what loves and trials and heart breaks would be lived out in the house to be. Suddenly she came to, remembering that he had asked if she thought the place could be made livable.

"Why not?" she said.

"Well—it's twelve miles from the city——"

"You'd have a car. Why would you want it nearer the city?"

"I wouldn't. I just wondered——. I want to build a house like a Swiss chalet, low and brown with a little corner tower for a sunroom, and a stone foundation just piling up naturally out of the ground, and a stone chimney with a fireplace as wide as a cave, where a person could dream the wildest kind of dreams and then live them. You can hear the creek roaring over the hill; there's enough water power there to run a factory, and the house could be made pretty snug, I think; but sometimes I'm afraid I've just let myself be carried away with a vision—east is east, and the country will never make a good imitation of the town. You have lived in the city, and you know the country pretty well. Do you think this could be made a place where—well, where anyone not used to country life would be happy?"

"I think it could." She was looking away and the tone did not sound at all impulsive. Desperately he tried again.

"Do you think a man would be a downright piker to ask a girl who has always had everything she wanted to come to a place like this?"

"No." The answer was very frank, and the girl bolted directly into a rapid, and not very comprehensive review of plans she had seen

developed in less promising places. For some reason she seemed confused.

CHAPTER X.

From the day when he took the farmers of his county to see how another man had harnessed the creek which ran wild through his pastures, setting it to work to cut the wood, and grind the grain and to run every hand machine from the fanning-mill to the grindstone, the Agricultural Representative began to see visions.

"Did you ever see anything like it?" one man exclaimed when they were going over the details afterwards. "There wasn't a darned crank on the place. The thing must do more than one man's work, and the most soul-aggravatin' part of the work at that. Now at our place there's just the boy and me to do everything, and we're prowlin' around the barn with a lantern till nine o'clock most nights. We get a man for a month or two sometimes, but the wife isn't strong and it makes more work for her. Besides, as wages go now it doesn't pay. I know Jim gets discouraged sometimes. He has a fair schooling and the wages he could get in town must look pretty good compared with what we turn in in actual cash from the farm; a boy doesn't see what capital's being laid away in the place every year. If he's half alive he knows he's living the

best part of his life now; and he isn't going to waste it all laying up something for a time when he can't enjoy it.

"I've tried to keep Jim at home by giving him a calf or a colt once in a while, like my father used to do, but if a boy has to feed calves and curry colts long after the hour when every other working man has hung up his overalls, he gets sick of them. I never saw a boy sick of tinkerin' around a gasoline engine or a motor, though. If Jim goes his mother and I might as well go too, and we're so used to the old place now that I guess we'd never get over being homesick if we left it. I wish you'd come up and measure the flow of our creek."

Another evening one of the young men who had taken the junior farmers' course in the winter came into the agricultural office looking rather embarrassed.

"It's about the water-power," he began.

"Oh, yes," Billy encouraged. He wasn't thinking of much except water power these days and was glad of an opportunity to unload his enthusiasm. Besides, the boy had just commenced farming on a place of his own, and the agricultural adviser knew that young blood moves more quickly in adopting reforms. "I should think you'd have a pretty good force from that hill of yours," he said. "What did you think of doing?"

"Well, you see," the boy stammered, "it's like

this. I ain't just sure what's the best way. I want to get married and I don't know what to do."

The Representative stared. He had had varied requests for advice since he came to stand for the Department of Agriculture in the community, but this was something new. Under his quizzical grin the boy reddened painfully. He had never seen the Representative's steady brown eyes hold such a glint of amusement, and he was afraid he was going to laugh.

"I'm sorry," Billy said without looking particularly sympathetic, "but I don't know much about it myself. It would just be a case of the blind leading the blind."

"Oh!" The boy began to grasp things; then he roared. "I guess you'll learn," he admitted dryly. "Leastways you don't strike the neighborhood up around 'The Heights' as one that wasn't interested."

Billy felt his own face warming up. "The Heights" was the section surrounding the Evison estate, and in his evening spins over the country roads he had often met his client jogging quietly along in a rubber-tired buggy, his feet stretched out comfortably on the dashboard and his interest evidently very much absorbed in a white-robed presence beside him. Billy felt that they had a singularly common interest, and he shook hands with him across the table.

"Go ahead," he said. "What has the water-power to do with your case?"

"If you'd been down at our club meetings oftener this summer you'd have known I was keeping company with the school-teacher."

There was an unmistakable pride in the confession. The school-teacher evidently held a rather superior place in the social life of the neighborhood, and again Billy felt the nearness of a kindred interest. At the same time he interpreted something of reproach in the words "if you'd been down to our club meetings oftener. . . . ."

Unfortunately the club met on Tuesday evenings and Miss Evison seemed to be free more often on Tuesday than on other nights of the week. Frequently when he was about ready to leave the office the 'phone would ring and the familiar flute-like voice would pipe, "I was afraid you might have gone. I meant to call all afternoon and had almost forgotten." Then the tone would drop almost to a whisper, "I'm afraid I've been very stingy of my time lately, but we'd have the whole evening to ourselves if you'd care to come to-night."

Once he had been obliged to tell her that this was the night when his Junior Farmers held their meeting and that he had almost promised to be there.

"I'm so sorry," she replied, with touching

plaintiveness. "We're having a little euchre. Some friends from town have just dropped in. They're very informal, and I know you'd enjoy it. You couldn't leave your precious young farmers for just one night?"

"I've done that so many nights. Perhaps I could leave the meeting early and call on the way home?"

She was unmistakably hurt.

"Oh, no; don't trouble," she answered quickly. "I wouldn't *think* of having you do such a thing. It doesn't matter. I just thought perhaps you'd *like* to come."

Another time he had asked her to come with him. It was an evening when girls attended.

"You know," she said, "it's very sweet of you to offer to take me right into your Holy-of-Holies to hear how they feed their calves and the like, but it would be casting your pearls before a very ungrateful little pig. I wouldn't enjoy it a bit. And I think, too, if you'll take an experienced person's advice, that you're getting too much of it yourself. Do you know that you've talked to me an hour now, about waterwheels?"

"I'm sorry."

"I like to hear about them, and what you're doing and everything, but don't you think if you work all day at that sort of thing, it's enough without running to meetings at night? It doesn't leave you any time for social interests at all.

I'm sure you wouldn't have any trouble in getting into the Country Club, and the people there are so different. Most of the members are men and women of wide social experience."

Billy knew something of their social experience, but he didn't tell her. Neither did he make any effort to gain admittance to the club, but he did spend more evenings attending theatres and motoring excursions than was good for his Junior Farmers' Society. He felt that he deserved the unconscious reproof, "If you'd been at our meetings oftener," from this young man whose aspirations were, after all, so like his own. Evidently, however, his friend's efforts had accomplished something, while his case was as uncertain as ever.

"You're going to marry the teacher, then?" he asked.

"Yes." There was no doubt about that. "She isn't afraid to go on a farm because she doesn't know anything about it. She'd always lived in town before she came here, but she's crazy about the country, and no gush about it either. She takes the kids to the woods and has them making gardens at the school, and all that. When I bought the farm every old wiseacre in the settlement came and said: 'You're making a mistake. That girl's never done farm work and wouldn't stand it for a year.' I could have wrung their necks. I didn't want to marry any girl to have

her help to support the place. I thought I could make things so she wouldn't have to work any harder to take care of a home out here than she would in town. There was no person I could ask about it until you brought that girl out to the farm excursion. I didn't know what she'd think, but I didn't suppose I'd ever see her again, anyway, so I asked her if she thought a fellow had any right to take a girl who didn't know anything about farming out to a place like mine, and if she thought a farm house could be made just as comfortable and handy as a place in town. She's some girl that. She never smiled, and she didn't seem surprised—she was a sight more considerate than some other people I know. She said that a girl worth having wouldn't be afraid to take a chance on a few hardships with a man, but that the work on an average farm with no conveniences at all was too hard for any woman. Then she showed how an ordinary house could be made a regular doves' nest for the price of an automobile."

Billy was thinking of his own inquiry on the way to the station. It struck him with a certain grim amusement that she would be rather impressed with the prevailing sentiment. And she had said: "A girl worth having wouldn't be afraid to take a chance on a few hardships with a man." She hadn't told him that.

When he came out of his reverie the boy was still talking.

"So I thought if you'd come and measure the flow of the creek," he was saying, "I'd know what to do. If there isn't enough water power, I'll get a gasoline engine big enough to pump water for a bathroom and do the power work around the house, anyway."

A few other inquiries for power systems came in, but their motives were more purely economic. The labor problem was becoming more baffling every year; hired men were expensive, and they wouldn't stay. The water power, once installed, would cost nothing; it would work all day and all year until the bed of the stream was worn level. Billy knew that once started the fever was bound to spread, and he had visions.

When his car climbed the hills at sunrise, as it often did now that the work was pressing, with school fairs and marketing associations busy disposing of the year's harvests, he frequently saw a round-shouldered, blue-overalled boy, half awake, plodding out to the barn. He remembered well the sleepy stupidness, the torturing ache of the body weakened by the fever of growth, and stiffened by long hours of a man's work. Some day, he believed, every farm in the district would have mechanical power doing the heart-breaking drudgery which was making boys shiver at the thought of farming all their lives. Occa-

sionally a woman coming from the barn with her milk-pails and a fretful little toddler or two tagging along after her would startle him with a crowd of memories which he had been trying hard to forget. Whatever changes might come now, he would always have to remember that until he was old enough to do it himself, nothing had been done to make things easier for his mother. In the evenings when he drove home late and saw families still struggling with belated chores, he had a dream of a time when every farm would have regular hours, when the family would gather in the evenings not too tired to enjoy each other, when the mothers of the farms, famed in all history for giving the world its sturdiest, brainiest children, would have time to give their best to all their children, to put their best work on the black sheep, or misfits, or handicapped, or delicate ones, for whom there is little special provision in the country outside their own homes.

A speaker at a political meeting in the town hall had recently expressed something of the same ideas. "There is a movement for better things among the farmers' wives," he said. "The idea is finding recognition among them that all the prizes of progress are no longer to be allowed to go to the man-life on the farm while the woman-life is left to vegetate. The woman on the farm must bear the oncoming hosts of strong

men, or they will not be borne. And unless the farm women can live under conditions which make for happiness, health and pride our whole nation will be weakened by ill-health, unhappiness, and unrest of the mothers and wives."

A few of the more adventurous women had accompanied their husbands to hear the speaker, but they gave little sign of their approval or disapproval of his sentiments. A week or two later Mrs. Burns called at the agricultural office to see if the Representative would have time, with all the community water-power demands, to help do something for the children. Billy hoped he would have time. Recollections of certain experiences of his own childhood on the Swamp Farm had left his sympathies quick for any youngster suffering possibly some of the same tribulations. Yet he knew the homes in the neighborhood pretty well, and he knew that child-labor could not be called an evil of the section, except in the backward crevices of the hills, and in the best counties of the province there are "way-back" places where a lot of evils go unmolested. Even on one of the leading farms near the town, where the children of the family were perhaps over cared for, there was a "Home-boy," stolid, stunted, stupid-looking, who couldn't talk plain, and who went around with his mouth open and a painful, bitter look about his eyes. Billy had misgivings as to how things

were going with him. He felt ready to support any movement which Mrs. Burns might have in mind.

"You remember hearing that political speaker say that the woman on the farm gave the world its sturdiest children?" she began. "Well, after what I had seen in hospital work, and what I've seen right around home, I wondered. Last week we had a doctor talk to us at the Women's Institute, and he showed us that the tradition that children brought up in the country are healthier than children brought up in the city is all a lie. He showed us that while the death rate in the cities has been going down steadily for the last ten years, in the country it maintains a pretty straight line. The beginning of most of it starts with the children. In the country we don't go to doctors or dentists or oculists until the case gets desperate; it's a good deal of trouble to go, and often the cost has to be considered. Most people have never been taught that "little" things like enlarged tonsils or bad teeth can become very serious.

"I was in a house the other day when one of the girls came home from school crying with a toothache. She had been suffering for weeks, but they said it was only a first tooth; it would soon come out itself. She had never gone to a dentist in her life, and her front teeth were so crooked as to be a disfigurement. If something

isn't done soon she will have to go through her whole life disfigured. It isn't fair.

"One of our neighbor's boys had always been considered stupid. The teachers didn't know what was wrong with him; he just didn't grasp things. He also made a great deal of amusement for the school by his awkwardness; he couldn't walk across the room without bumping into things. They have just by accident discovered that he's nearly blind. The oculist can do a good deal for him even yet, but he can never bring his sight back perfectly, and his school years have been wasted. That could have been prevented.

"In a garden in our little village at home, a young woman with a twisted back works all day with the flowers—they are the closest friends she has. I've noticed that she is always there in the morning and afternoon when the school children go past. They pick the flowers through the fence and go on unrebuked, and I've seen her stand watching them up the road, especially the little five-year-olds, with tears in her eyes and a look almost rebellious. She won't ever have any children, you see. And it's all because no one noticed the curvature when it was just beginning and could have been straightened. She was sent to school to sit in the same old painful seat day after day so she might 'pass the entrance.'

"Just one other case. On the farm next ours, a girl with brown eyes like a Madonna's, and the

proverbial crown of red-gold hair, is suffering everything from the consciousness of a cruel disfigurement. When she was three years old an adenoid growth blocked the natural breathing passage, and the only thing left for her to do was to keep her mouth open and catch whatever air she could. Of course, the result was that the upper jaw narrowed and the teeth protruded, taking the character entirely away from the lower part of the face. She kept having colds, and became so deaf that when she was about grown up it was necessary to operate and remove the growth. Her hearing came back pretty well, but the natural lines of her face will never come back. An operation at the beginning would have changed her whole life.

"Now we want to have a doctor come and examine the children in the schools, and then if there's anything wrong we want to have a clinic and get them taken care of. We don't know just how to go about it. Will you help us?"

The Representative was not indifferent or pessimistic. He knew that other Women's Institutes had engineered Medical Examination campaigns in the public schools, that they had even held school clinics, and brought a surgeon to operate on the youngsters who needed it, and he knew that in some way the Department of Agriculture stood back of them in the undertaking. That was as far as his interest had gone.

As for helping personally with the procedure, he would rather blunder into a hornets' nest than get mixed up in the detail of a women's organization. As usual, when he needed help, he thought of Ruth. She would understand just how to map out the whole campaign. She was working for the Department, and if Mrs. Burns would write, no doubt they would send her. Of course, he would be pleased to give any incidental help he could.

Ruth came and outlined the plan. The Institute would first have to get the school board's consent to let them go on with the work. Then they could get the local doctors to look the children over and see if there were any suffering from the troubles that could be remedied. If they could have a nurse to help with the inspection and to visit the homes in a neighborly way and report what the kiddies needed, so much the better. If they wanted to make the campaign of real, practical help, they could hold a clinic and have the children actually treated.

It was well on in December before the clinic could be arranged, and the general excitement kept the telephones busy and caused considerable delay in picking the geese for the Christmas market. Mrs. Burns had offered to turn her house into a hospital for the day and other members of the Institute were contributing supplies of sheets and towels for the occasion. Mrs.

Evison had dropped in at an Institute meeting to express her delighted approval of the plan and to say that her daughter would be pleased to drive their car all day, if necessary, to fetch the children to and from the clinic. Billy placed the Department of Agriculture's car at their service, praying in secret that they wouldn't send him out alone with any of the patients. A surgeon, young, but notoriously successful, was being brought from the city, and Ruth was coming to help.

On the evening before the day of the clinic, when Billy was driving home, he overtook the "Home boy" trudging up to the village to get what little social color he could from the gossip of the regular store roosters. He climbed into the car with his accustomed sullenness—or what was generally considered sullenness. Billy knew it was only a painful self-consciousness dulled a little by dragging dog-tiredness. He was breathing audibly through his distorted mouth, and his deafness gave a stupid look to his face.

"Why don't you come up to our Junior Farmers' meetings?" the Representative began.

The boy didn't look up.

"They ain't for the likes of me." he said.

"Of course they are," the Representative declared, warmly. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, I don't mean that your fellows are snobs," the boy admitted, "but there's a difference, and

you know it. They're used to being out. They can make speeches and talk, and me—I can't talk."

Billy had never realized before how the boy's pride had suffered through his affliction. He wondered if the school clinic would admit him; or, what would be more difficult, whether he could persuade him to go. He made the proposition as tactfully as he could.

"I don't belong there, neither," the boy replied. "I've never gone to school, and, anyway, I ain't in the same class. I don't know any of the folks except the men I meet at threshin's. Jim that come out here the same time I did, it's different with him. At the place where he works, they don't make much difference by him. But the folks at the Home thinks if they once gets us out to what they call the 'green country,' they've sort of landed us in 'eaven. Men send in for 'a boy to do chores,' but we know it's a hired man they want. 'Course it's different with Jim, but then I'm different to Jim. If you can't talk an' you can't hear, an' your mouth hangs open, you can't expect folks to want you around more-n-s necessary."

Billy had never tried so hard to argue anyone out of a mistaken idea. His own experience had given him an insight into a boy's sensitiveness at the time when life is opening a strange world to him, and he needs a confidant, and he had

not forgotten how the "Representative" in his county at home had given him confidence. He determined to stay right with this boy until he saw him past the turning-place. When he let him out of the car at the store rendezvous, he urged:

"Now, you'll come to-morrow and let them fix you up? I'll go with you."

The boy eyed him shrewdly for a minute, then his face softened.

"I guess you're all right," he conceded. "I guess you wouldn't take it as any trouble, but that's not sayin' what the others 'ud think. I'll think it over. If I can bring myself to it, I'll call in an' tell you before I go back."

In the office Billy sorted over his mail, and pushed it away. Some of the letters dealt with marketing news that meant hundreds of dollars gain or loss to the community; one carried a promise of a co-operative creamery that had been one of his main ambitions for the district —but these things didn't seem so important to-night. If the clinic to-morrow could remove one boy's handicap and give him the chance for life that Nature meant him to have, it would be worth more than several reforms for more profitable farming. If he were not taken care of now the chances were that he would never be. He decided to walk over to the store and make

sure of seeing him before he went home. Then the phone called him.

"Oh, you *are* there at last!" It was the soft little purring tone that always set his pulses pounding. "Could you possibly run up for a little while?"

"I'm afraid—" he began.

"But listen," she interrupted. "I'm going to help you to-morrow, you know, and mother and I have some plans we'd like to talk over with you. We're delighted that you're having such a distinguished surgeon as Dr. Knight. It's really very unusual for him to go out of the city at all, and we thought you wouldn't want him to go to the Village Inn—it's quite impossible, you know, so mother thought you'd better have him come here. Dad has met him, I think, and we'd be glad to have him. Perhaps Miss McDonald would come, too, though she's so used to going to all sorts of places."

"All right," he agreed, absently. "And you're going to help"—that was the thing that impressed him. "That's fine."

"I'm going to drive the car all day," she announced, emphatically.

"That's fine," he said again. At last she was interested. Of course, she couldn't resist the children—she was such a feminine bit of creation.

"And I know you're going to say you have

some state council or something on to-night," she rattled along; then dropping her voice appealingly, "I know I'm an awful nuisance, that I'm just hindering you all the time, but I *do* want you to-night. Was it anything important?"

"Why, I wanted to see the boy who works at McGill's. I was wondering if we could get him into the clinic to-morrow."

"Oh, I'm *sure* we could. I'll get Mother to speak for him. I'm so glad it was nothing urgent. I'll expect you, then. You'll hurry?"

Billy didn't exactly hurry. He walked up and down the office a few times, looking more like swearing than his friends would have thought possible. Then he remembered the confession, "I know I'm just hindering your work all the time." Now, when she was beginning to be interested, to even try to help, he was losing his temper over having a plan of his own upset. He got ready to go—which took some time—and on the way out he called at the store. They told him the boy had gone.

When Billy drove his ambulance out to the Burns farm the next morning and carried a little blanket-wrapped patient into the house, he found Ruth already there. She was bending over a cot, evidently trying to restore courage to a brave little fellow who was having a hard struggle to keep the corners of his mouth from going down. The child said something at last

and her head went down beside him on the pillow. There was an unsteady little gurgle of a laugh, so low and deep and comrady that it made him shiver a little. He had heard the little sob catch at the end of it and he was aware that it meant a good deal. When she looked up and saw him she colored warmly, then came straight to meet him in her frank, friendly way; but he thought she left him very soon to go back to her work. He would have liked to stay and watch her putting the children to bed. There was something so strong and easy in the way she lifted them; something so clever and steady in her supple hands—you could almost feel the touch in watching them; something so close and reassuring in the way she held the nervous ones. But his presence seemed to embarrass her, so he went away.

He didn't see her again until evening. He had finished his part of the day's programme, and had helped the doctor to pack away in the long, deep-purring Evison car the patients who required the easiest riding. He had never known Marjorie to be so adorable. She was unnecessarily solicitous for the comfort of the children, and she took orders from the doctor with a demure seriousness that was most becoming. When he tucked the rugs about her as she started off with her last convoy, she leaned down and whispered, "We're expecting you for dinner.

You'll bring the doctor—and Miss Macdonald, if she'll come."

As she bent over the wheel in her red motoring outfit, with the wind whipping a bright color in her cheeks, and her eyes dark and glowing, she seemed like nothing so much as a brilliant scarlet tanager, poised for flight. It was unreasonable, he reflected, to expect a girl like that to conform to standards set for ordinary people. Her heart was in the right place, however irresponsible she might seem sometimes. How thoughtful she had been for the children.

In the house the women were clearing away the litter from the day's work. Ruth was still busy. Her white uniform had lost some of its crispness; her face was flushed; her hair was straying out from under her nurse's cowl. It had been a busy day. She was testing the heat of some irons on the stove when Billy came in.

"Are you nearly through?" he asked. "Is there anything I can do? I want to take you to Evison's for dinner."

"I'm sorry," she said, "but we've just had another patient come in. The doctor's operating now."

"And what are you going to do?"

"Iron his bed."

He smiled to think she knew the homely trick; then a sharp, pained look crossed his face.

"My mother used to do that," he said.

She put the iron down and looked at him just as she had done when she followed him home from his mother's funeral and heard him sob out his agony for the things he couldn't help.

"I know," she said. "She did it for me once, too. I don't wonder that you remember how good she was."

The little worried wrinkle had gone from between her eyes. In some inexplicable way she seemed to be getting across to him the warmth of her sympathy, and he felt for the first time the full wonder of it. What a treasure would be there for some man to explore, and how blind and ungrateful he had been all along. He had never done anything but go to her for help. Even now she looked tired enough to go into hysterics instead of troubling to think about him, and he felt he had been nothing less than brutal. She was gathering up her irons.

"When you get that done will you come?" he begged. "We'll drive around till you get rid of the ether you've been breathing all day. I didn't think what I was getting you into."

"But, you see, it's a pretty bad case, and I'm going to stay all night with the boy."

"Why can't some of his own people stay?"

"He hasn't any people, nor evidently any friends. He's a boy from the Home, who works somewhere around. He came in alone at the last minute, and you could see it had been pretty

hard for him. We want to make it as easy as we can."

She went away smiling, and Billy went out, bitterly ashamed of himself. It had been hard for the boy to come, and he hadn't done anything to help him.

An hour later the doctor came out.

"I suppose we're late," he grumbled. "I don't know whether to curse that girl or go down on my knees and worship her. I'd had about enough bad tonsils to-day without this last case, and there was no reason under the sun why we should take an outsider like that in a school clinic, but she held me right to it. Now she's going to see him through the night."

The evening at Evison's held a new atmosphere for Billy. The elegant luxury of the place seemed very restful after the crowded confusion of the Burns home. Marjorie was unusually quiet and sweet and dignified. She seemed even a little shy in the presence of the notorious surgeon, listening with charming attention to all he said, but saying little herself. However, the men talked, and they talked to her and for her—Billy with his usual sincere interest; the doctor with his clever way of unconsciously saying the most complimentary things. It was quite possible that he had said them before, of course, and quite probable that he would say them again and keep right on saying them so long as people

with grown-up daughters continued to shower him with their hospitality. Several times she caught Billy watching her with the sober tenderness that he always dropped apologetically when she looked, but the doctor looked her over with a daring admiration that might mean anything or nothing. It was splendid to have Billy there, because whatever the doctor's attitude might be, he couldn't help seeing that another man—a rather exceptional man, too—was in earnest, and that meant a great deal for a girl sometimes. Altogether, she felt that she was being a great success.

Marjorie had an idea that men, at least men with a reputation, liked to talk about themselves, and under cover of the general table conversation, she confided to Dr. Knight that she thought it was *wonderful* to be able to do so much for people, especially for "the little children." "When I see other people doing things like that, I just wonder what I'm living for," she confessed, gravely, as though she had just been awakened to the responsibility of existence through his greatness. "It's simply unbearable to see people suffer and do nothing to help them—especially the babies. Don't you think it's rather hard to be a girl?"

"What about training for a nurse?" he suggested practically.

She hadn't expected anything like that, and she thought it was scarcely kind of him. She looked appealingly at her mother.

"I guess Marjorie's a home girl," the mother explained, smiling with indulgent pride at her daughter. "And, of course, her father wouldn't think of letting her go away from home. She was at college two years ago studying domestic science and she did enjoy that so much, but we were completely lost without her. I guess we're rather selfish."

And the men both smiled across at her with the masculine equivalent for her mother's expression. She had always found it most gratifying to be admired by two men at the same time.

Of course, she was "a home girl," Billy thought, he he drove home. Every little grace of her feminine personality proclaimed her made to be taken care of, and how proud of her a man would be. He imagined with some anxiety how hard it would go with her if she ever came to a place where she wouldn't have the consideration they gave her at home, and he found himself wondering just what manner of man this Dr. Knight was, apart from his profession. When he had left them he was turning her music and he had never known her to be so generous with her playing. He wouldn't admit that he was jealous, but one of those proverbial little clouds the size of a man's hand seemed to be threatening his skies.

When he passed the Burns house he saw a dim light in an upstairs window and was reminded bitterly again of his neglect of the Home boy. However, Ruth would take care of him. He could see her shadow moving against the blind now, and he thought how tired she must be. He didn't know that her tiredness had gone, leaving something infinitely more painful in its place.

Under the anesthetic the boy had mumbled something about the "agricultural man" who had told him to come.

"Mr. Withers takes an interest in everything," Mrs. Burns had remarked. "He's an exceptionally fine young man. There's just one thing that's spoiling his work a little. He's very much in love with Miss Evison. You can imagine how seriously he would take anything like that, and it interferes with his work sometimes."

It was then that Ruth forgot her tiredness. She only ached for her own room at home where she could be alone for a while.

CHAPTER XI.

"Not unto the forest, O my lover,
O my lover, do not lead me to the forest.
Joy is where the temples are, lines of dancers swinging far,
Drums and lyres and viols in the town,
And the flapping leaves would blind me, and the clinging vines would bind me,
And the thorny rose-boughs tear my saffron gown.
I will love you by the light, and the beat of drums at night,
And the echoing of laughter in my ears,
But I fear the forest."

—Greek Folk Song.

It was Christmas Eve. A soft, light snow had left the country white and downy as a young swan's breast. As if the feather padding of the road had muffled the engine, the car cut along quietly as a boat, but the clear, cooing tones of the girl's voice carried far, and her laughter echoed back from the trees like the mimicry of some mischievous nymph. In the after calm of the year's first snowstorm the purity of the earth and air and sky gave the world that touch of unreality dear to poets and lovers, and Marjorie and Billy had come out in the late afternoon, as they often did on holidays and Sundays, to breathe for miles the air of the hills, to watch the lights of the city rush out through the dusk like streams of little racing fires, and to drive

wherever fancy led them, stopping somewhere in town for supper and coming home slowly, very slowly and quietly in the dark.

"Let's take some road we don't know," the girl suggested. "Let's go over the hills, and then just when it's getting dark we'll come to the edge of the heights somewhere and coast right down into the city, like we did the first night you came here—do you remember?"

"Every second of it."

"That was in the spring. Even the town was half asleep and lazy after the winter's dissipation; to-night it will be as gay as a debutantes' ball. In the country it was muddy and the fields and barns and fences stood out ugly and unashamed of themselves, like some old scrub-woman. Now the snow comes and gives her a new dress, you see, and here she is, a lady in white fox and diamonds. Wonderful, isn't it, what clothes will do? But underneath she's still the same old scrub-woman, the work-driven, squalid country. How I pity the people who have to stay here all their lives. Where are we going?"

Billy had turned up a new road, the winding, wooded avenue leading to the place on the hill. He had felt that if she could ever see its beauty it would be to-day, with the glow of the sun still pink above the cedars jagging the horizon, and the early moon making sharp shadows and glittering open spaces on the snow. Her last burst of

sympathy for the people who had to live in the country was not encouraging, but he was so filled with the spell of it all himself that it seemed as though he must fire her with some of his enthusiasm.

At the crest of the hill the car stopped and he told her to look. There was nothing tangible to see but a deep expanse of level whiteness with a windbreak of black pines at the back, and one tall gnarl-limbed maple sheltering the remains of a ruined old house. She looked about blankly and asked:

"What is it?"

He smiled. "There's isn't much to see, yet," he said, "but I've always wanted to show you this place. I think it could be made a little heaven and I want to buy it. I can just see what it would be like on a night like this with the light shining from the windows and the sparks from the fireplace shooting right up to the sky, and inside——"

"But it would cost an awful lot to fix it up and when you did get it done it would be so far from everywhere. But then you like to be away off from people and towns, don't you?"

"It wouldn't matter what I liked. A man can make his home anywhere; I suppose something of the savage in him likes to get out to the wild places. You think this is lonesome, then? It seems the beginning of an Eldorado to me. Listen

to the trees. On the stillest days you can hear those pines starting up with a low, cooing little shiver, growing louder and louder till you'd think there was a forest of them. It can be the sleepiest or the thrilliest sound in the world, I think."

"To me they sound like someone crazy, crying. Let's go." She shivered, crept deeper into her furs and consulted her little French wrist-watch. "Do you know it's getting late?" she finished a little wearily.

Then when the car had started she moved up closer—it was one of the trifling signs that always set him piling up the robes again, and scarcely above a whisper she confided:

"I'm sorry I don't like your place. I remember, when I was very small, the little boy who played with me came one day to see my new playhouse. It was the dream of my heart—up to that time—expressed in wood and paint and wonderful miniature furnishings, and I did so want him to like it. But he came and looked it over for a long time, frowning, with his hands in his pockets, just like a man. Then he said, 'I don't like it. It's too sissy,' and he walked right away. But when I cried, he came back and he said, 'I don't like your house, but that isn't saying I don't like you, and 'cause you're a girl, I guess maybe I like you better 'cause you like a house like that.' . . . You understand, don't you, Billy?"

She was rather startled by the intense searching that suddenly came into his steady eyes. His right hand was leaving the wheel and she wasn't ready for this. She laughed gaily to break the tension, and finished her parable.

"I believe I had almost made you forget that we're grown up. Things aren't nearly so simple as when we lived in play-houses, are they?"

"Heavens, no," he agreed, and went back to the wheel.

To hide the shock of the sudden contact with earth after his insane flight he turned his attention to the car, inquiring lightly:

"Shall we fly for a mile or two? There aren't any speed laws here, nor many living things to run over. It's one of the advantages of a place as wild as this, that you can do just as you like."

So they raced against the wind, the girl looking ahead to catch the first glow of the city lights, and Billy staring blindly at the road and hearing the crying of the pines waiting for a house and warmth and light and life to shelter. He was beginning to accept the haunting suspicion that it wasn't just the fear for the hard, lonely places that was responsible for the girl's indifference, but that all his constant, ardent reaching out for her had failed absolutely to awaken anything deeper than a passing delight in being courted. Some unaccountable flash of disillusionment made him wonder if she was capable of anything

more than this weak, kittenlike playfulness, and as quickly he cursed himself for being an unchivalrous cad, and came to, with all his usual interest.

They were not strangers to the most select cafes in town, and they found a table in a corner close to a blazing fire, half screened from the crowd, but where a panel mirror reflected all the gaiety of the place. They made a very human little pantomime, these pleasure-seekers—over-made-up women with bloated, sated-looking men; gay young college crowds, glowing and noisy, trooping in from an afternoon on the ice; engaged couples making the most of one of the rare celebrations which the limits of their purses and the needs of the half-furnished nest would allow, and other less elated, but obviously more comfortable, men and women whom one could spot immediately as having left the baby with a grandmother and come here to snatch a respite from family ties, only to fly happily back to them again and ask, "After all what did we ever see to prize so much in what we called our liberty?"

At odd moments Billy found himself prospecting their cases in the light of his own ambitions; most of the time he was unconscious of any presence in the room other than the girl sitting opposite him. He was also proudly aware of other admiring glances in her direction. It was the same dazzling attraction that had made her so

popular at dances and house-parties almost before she was grown up. The wild rose color in her cheeks, the gold in her crinkling hair, the bits of just the right shade of an amethyst gown peeping out from her white furs, and the wonderful little hat that had evidently been the breast of a bird—all had their part in the effect. More compelling still were the wavering blue eyes with their little brown specks. They seemed very mysterious and bright and childishly troubled tonight, but that was because she was searching the crowd to see if there might be "anyone she knew."

Coming back from one of these explorations she suddenly seemed to remember that she owed some attention to Billy. Without thinking much she inquired gaily:

"When you go out to your farm are you still going to come in here sometimes to celebrate?"

"Every Christmas Eve anyway. You don't think I expect to make a hermitage of the farm, do you?"

"I didn't know. It's so hard for me to get your viewpoint." The tone implied that she would give worlds to acquire the art of getting his viewpoint. Then, lest his courage should surprise her again, she rattled on:

"And you will say to your wife, 'The girl who taught me to like these things couldn't have made a pound of butter to save her life'."

He didn't laugh and he didn't play up to her banter as he generally did. He looked away from her, and she knew he was angry. She leaned forward, but failed to get his attention; then she called softly:

"Billy——"

It was the irresistible childish plea to be forgiven, but for the first time it failed to move him. His hand was resting on the table. She reached across until her fingers almost touched his and again she called, "Billy," but it was almost a whisper this time and very unsteady. The brown fingers closed quickly and warmly over the conciliatory hand and held it for a minute longer than necessary, but the hurt had not quite left him. With all her "socially trained" delicacy, he realized that she had no scruples about rushing into what he considered sacred ground. The armor of her frivolity was always ready as a check to his seriousness, and while she could seem alluringly in earnest herself sometimes, the minute he turned to follow her again she brought his pursuit down to the level of common philandering. Suddenly he reddened and slowly released her hand; at the next table a sleek, muddy-eyed man with a theatrical-looking woman, was doing the same thing.

Whether it was an effort or not, he caught the spirit of her gaiety very well after that. On their way to the theatre they called at a florist's and he

experienced a new, thrilling sense of nearness in being allowed to hold the long-stemmed roses in place while she pinned them to her dress. It was nearly midnight when their car threaded its way out from the flashing, snorting tangle of limousines and taxis, and gradually leaving the lights and the noises behind, purred out toward the snowy darkness of the hills. The moon had gone; there were no lights in the houses, and they felt strangely alone and quiet.

Presently in a thin, groping little voice she said:

"I almost made you angry to-night, didn't I?"

He laughed. "I'm afraid you did. A man is generally an awful crank about some things, and if a thing means very much to him he can't stand to have it handled lightly."

"You mean——"

"That I love you. You see I've been trying so long to let you know. Most of the time I see what a fool I am to dream of such a thing. Then sometimes I go blind for a while and almost wonder if you don't care a little; but all the time, whether you care or not, it seems impossible to think of going on without you."

He was talking with a hard edge in his voice, both hands gripping the wheel as though he could manage them better if he kept them there. When she didn't answer, he turned and searched her

face hungrily for a minute, but looked away again unrewarded.

"Don't worry about it," he said gently. "I almost knew you couldn't. I shouldn't have said anything."

Marjorie was not accustomed to such unsensational *denouements* as this. She caught her breath in something so nearly like a sob that he came back more penitent than ever.

"Don't," he pleaded. "It's all right. I shouldn't have told you."

"But I didn't say that I didn't care—" She was going on to explain that a highly emotional nature was capable of varying shades of caring, but there was nothing in Billy's simple code of ethics to anticipate such a fine analysis of the case. Perhaps he waited for one breathless second to be sure he had heard aright; the next, she was pushing him away.

"How could you!" she stormed. "How could you!" She was angry and injured and tearful—or she seemed to be, and for the minute the thought of his mistake staggered him. Then very quietly he said:

"I didn't understand, and I'm sorry; but I'm not ashamed. I know I've offended you, but you wouldn't be offended if you knew what I meant. You think it's savage and primitive. It is that, I guess; but I want you to know that at least it's genuine, and—it's *not* brutal. If things had

been different, if you could have cared and married me, you would know."

Marjorie was considering. It was not her first experience of this kind. You can't make a practice of playing with animals and not get mussed up sometimes, but with a girl in her social position most men of the "socially experienced" set would not have blustered into things so whole heartedly. If they did, beneath their cajoling apologies afterwards, there would lurk a quizzical half-smile, as much as to say, "What did you start the thing for? Just what is the game?" It generally meant the end of a flirtation and the loss of the girl's prestige in that particular quarter; but, somehow, Billy had left her with all her self-respect. It was hard to know what to do, for even with the weak passion of which her selfish make-up was capable, she had unwittingly stumbled into a little love herself.

"I—I don't want to be silly about this," she advanced magnanimously after a while. "I'm not offended, but don't let's spoil everything by being serious on our last night together."

"Our *last* night?"

"The last for a while, anyway. I guess I didn't tell you that I'm going to town for the winter—my really official *debut* in society. Auntie wants me, and Dad and Mother have consented to let me go for the season. You see," she explained rather plaintively, "I've never really had an op-

portunity of trying my wings at all, and I just crave life and excitement and company. Maybe some day I'll settle down and be the domestic little wren you'd like to see me; but don't you see, I'm so young—I don't want to get married. I just want to live for awhile. I think a winter in town will do me lots of good. Auntie knows the very best people, and she entertains beautifully. Would you—I wonder if you'd care to see some of my little dresses?"

Later, in her luxurious little sitting-room, she brought out the "little dresses" and caressingly displayed them one by one for his stupid admiration. They were very artful creations and considerably expensive, but Mrs. Evison, who appreciated the value of clothes as a social asset, considered them a good investment for her daughter. To Billy they emphasized how meagre she would find the kind of life he could give her, so far as purchasable things were concerned.

"You should consider yourself a very privileged person," she told him archly. "I don't know another man I'd show them to, but you won't be there when I wear them, and I just couldn't go without letting you see them. I wish you were coming, too. I hope you won't be lonesome when I've gone."

"Can I come to see you?"

She considered, surveying him slantwise. "If you'd asked me that yesterday, I might have said

'yes'; but after to-night—I wonder. You'd better wait. Maybe I'll send for you."

When he was leaving her he begged:

"I can see you to-morrow, anyway, can't I? You say you leave the day after."

"I'm sorry, but we're having a little dinner-party to-morrow. Dr. Knight and some of his friends have planned for a sleigh-ride. I guess I'll have to say good-bye to-night." Her voice seemed to be trembling a little. "And whatever happens, I'll always remember our little times together as some of the dearest of my life. You've been very good to me, Billy; I know, whatever happens, you won't think I've been heartless, or that I haven't cared at all. You're so much more generous than most men. I've read, somewhere, that where a girl is concerned, men are generally like boys setting out to catch a bird. They have a cage and they want a bird for it, and someone has told them that they can catch one by putting salt on its tail. Whenever they think they have just caught it, the bird flits off and waits till they come up again; it doesn't want to go into a cage. When it gets tired being pursued and flies away out of reach altogether, the little savage in them crops out, and they throw stones at the bird for leading them on. You won't ever think I did that, will you?"

She felt rather alone after he had gone, but then she knew that he would come back any time

she wanted him. For the present alluring possibilities were awaiting elsewhere. Dr. Knight had been very attentive in the way of motoring out to see her, but of course a great many liked to motor out to pleasant country homes on holidays. Once launched in society under the prestige of her aunt's influential wing, the situation would be different. From various angles she consulted her mirror, and decided that her prospects were good. She could already picture the quaint old Anglican church in the village decorated for her wedding; there would be lilies and smilax—she had often talked that over with her mother, and she would have a little empire dress, very girlish and bride-like, with her veil caught up in a Juliet cap. She visualized herself very distinctly coming down the church aisle. It would be very hard for Billy, for of course he would be there to follow her with that tragic worship in his sober eyes—it was far from likely that he would ever love anyone else—and when he came to say he hoped she would be happy, she just knew she wouldn't be able to keep the tears back, and she would lift her face—heavens, no! —she couldn't do that. Why, everything would be at an end with Billy, and she would have to go away with Dr. Knight. But she would know that he would be thinking about her and loving her just the same. And whenever she came home to her mother's receptions and things, she would

see that he was invited, and she would be very gracious to him.

A wicked little voice suggested another idea. What if she should come back sometime to find Billy in love with someone else? Men were so queer. She had known them to be married a year after some girl had supposedly broken their hearts, and to actually fall desperately and permanently in love with their wives. The possibility made her furious. If only Billy had had Dr. Knight's position—he would have been so everlastingly good to live with, and recklessly she made up her mind that if nothing materialized from her season in town—if Dr. Knight remained indefinite, she would come back and marry Billy. She couldn't go on a farm with him, of course, and she couldn't live all her life in small towns like this, but he could get something else to do; she had heard a man tell her father that he hoped to see him in the federal parliament some day. So if nothing else developed, she would marry Billy. The idea left her feeling beautifully generous and secure.

CHAPTER XII.

"These laid the world away; poured out the red
Sweet wine of youth; gave up the years to be
Of work and joy, and that unhoped serene
That men call age; and those who would have been
Their sons, they gave, their immortality."
—Rupert Brooke.

There was no sense of loss for Billy in the days that followed Miss Evison's leaving the neighborhood—you can't lose a thing you never had. Removed from the fascination of her presence, and reviewing one incident after another, there was only one theory to accept. It had been the affair of a moment for her, a diversion acceptable for the want of something better; now it was over, and she wanted to be free from any further obligation. Still, it was disconcerting to an agricultural expert, holding forth late in some village hall, while the fire in the boxstove burned low and the frost patterns crept over the steamy window panes, to have his efforts to inspire a sleepy audience with the need of greater production, suddenly sidetracked by a vision of a regal little figure in some palm-bordered ballroom, brilliant and excited and restless as a beautiful moth that has found the light.

He had now considerable free time in the even-

ings which might be turned to good account in his work, but people had become so accustomed to finding the office locked at night, that they had stopped calling, and it would be difficult to win back their interest. With notes of Miss Evison's social engagements in town constantly finding their way into the local papers, he could scarcely advertise that henceforth his evenings would be at the service of the community.

But it was not the blow of Miss Evison's dismissal, nor dissatisfaction with his work, which turned his affairs in another direction where things like these don't count for much. It was the first winter of the war and like many another young man absorbed in the peaceful industries of the green country, the Representative had had some serious debates with himself. The men who directed his work, peering through the chaos of the country's general unpreparedness to probable starvation ahead, kept the wires from head quarters hot, suggesting plans for growing bigger crops in the district, leaving it with the Representative to put the plans before the people. This they considered his best service just then. At the same time newspapers were bringing home reports that made it hard for men to go on tilling their fields, even to feed the men who were fighting, or the people whose homes had been outraged by an invading army.

Most of these steady, thinking young men with

ambitions in other directions, made no attempt to explain the motives which led them to put away all the things they cared for to enter a new life as hateful as it was strange to them. It might have been just the chivalry that guided their every-day conduct in less spectacular ways, or the more plebeian, but equally unselfish, spirit of doing an unpleasant, but necessary, thing because someone had to do it; perhaps the comradeship with others who were making the sacrifice had some part. Anyway, without discussion or ceremony, the Representative gave up his plans for the community and the possibilities of the place on the hill, which of course didn't mean anything now, anyway, and joined the county battalion. It would have been harder if his mother had been living, but as things were he reasoned it wouldn't matter much to anyone but Jean, and she had developed a splendid faculty for taking care of herself. It was difficult to associate the easy, self-assured young varsity student with the shy little school-teacher who in the years when she felt the loss of her mother most, had cried to him over problems on which he was helplessly ignorant. His unfailing solution was to send her to Ruth Macdonald for advice, until she acquired the habit of going herself, and didn't need his help any more. In one way, however, Jean remained unchanged from the little girl who had trotted after him everywhere

with the faithfulness of a little spaniel. He had taught her to climb trees, and skate, and swim, and though naturally timid and afraid of the water, she would float with him, perfectly confident, out to the deepest places. When, nervous and ill with the loneliness of her first school, she had sent for him, he had only to gather her up like the child she was, and she went right to sleep, secure and quiet in the strength and gentleness of his great body. With all the admirable, twentieth-century young woman's independence, he knew that the hero worship of the little sister remained the same, and at the thought of leaving her he was painfully conscious of his neglect since his interests and his holidays had been given so wholly to Miss Evison.

It was when he returned from the ceremony of putting on his uniform that this reproach seemed verified. The mail had brought a note from Ruth Macdonald saying "Jean has just been sent home for a nerve rest. I believe the trouble is mostly loneliness. If you could be with her for a while you might tide it over."

The stenographer covertly sizing up the Representative, with the popular feminine admiration for a uniform, wondered if his courage had suddenly failed him that he went so white. The idea wasn't convincing, however. The afternoon mail offered a more interesting explanation. With amazing constructive genius she reported

that Miss Evison had written offering to take him back—"and him signed up," she lamented tragically. The theory gained weight, but travelled faster, when Billy was seen taking the first train for the city.

Even Ruth became a victim to circumstantial evidence. The next day she found Jean alone, and troubled.

"Billy's enlisted," she shuddered.

Ruth experienced all the cold terror that the news has given women the world over when the men they cared about joined the army. She didn't say anything—people are so sick of the glib platitudes about the glory of sacrifice when they can't drive from their imaginations the actual torture of soul and body. Besides it never mattered whether Ruth put her sympathy into words or not. It came to you from the understanding kindness in her eyes, the quick, warm pressure of her hands, and a thousand little thoughtfulnesses which anticipated your needs. Her concern was perhaps too evident, for Jean hurried on to explain.

"Oh, it isn't just that he's going. I was expecting that, but everyone is saying he's going broken-hearted. Look—"

She indicated a paragraph in the morning paper which stated that Mr. and Mrs. Evison announced the marriage of their daughter, Marjorie Angela, to Dr. Knight.

Then Billy came in. He didn't look broken-hearted. In fact, for a man who had just lost the love of a life time he seemed in a much too healthy frame of mind to have any sentiment at all. As a matter of fact, of course, he hadn't seen the little announcement; he had some time ago stopped reading the social columns where Miss Evison's name figured, but with sisterly consideration Jean left the paper in his room where he could read it and have his battle out by himself. Ruth shared this consideration. When the evening papers, crowded with the latest draught of casualties, found space to describe at length the flowers and dresses at some tea given in honor of "the popular Miss Evison," the girls so obviously avoided any comment that Billy rather wondered if he shouldn't draw their attention to the fact that Miss Evison would be charming indeed in the gown of some imported-sounding stuff with pearls and lilies of the valley. Such wooden creatures men can be, where a little tragedy would seem the appropriate thing.

Jean's nerves were soon restored to smooth running order, for which the doctor gave no small share of credit to Ruth's efforts to keep her out of doors. The county battalion was training near the city, and every evening Billy could get off, the three of them would tramp out in moccasins and general Indian accoutrements to the edge of the city, to toboggan down a snow-

crusted hill, or to skate for miles down some winding creek straggling through spooky cedar swamps and open, moonlit fields. It was an invigorating change from the theatres and cafes that had been Billy's late amusement haunts—not that he had buried all these in the ashes of the past, but they seemed to have their purpose in catering to the needs of people who wanted their pleasures ready-made for them. His sister, by chance or design, frequently added other friends to their party, and he found himself, either by chance or design, taking Ruth farther up the ice than anyone else cared to go.

Of course it was natural enough; no other girl could skate so far without tiring; no other girl could abandon herself so wholly to the joy of a sport and still keep about her a sort of reverence for it. And when he watched her from a distance, slim, buoyant, wholly alive, taking the ice like a sail before a breeze, and remembered the unconscious glow in her friendly eyes as he had skated with her, he realized that it was rather gratifying to a man's pride to know that, while he was so unnecessary to her in a material way, she still cared to have him around. That there was something strained underneath her casual friendliness he knew, and wondered; he was beginning to find it hard to be perfectly natural himself. But when he took her home one night, and very

soberly asked if he might come in and talk to her, she said "It's pretty late."

He wasn't surprised. He felt that it was pretty late. He had been a long time awakening. No woman would value very highly the interest of a man supposedly trying to gather himself together from the blow of his ideal woman's engagement to another man, and she was not the type of girl likely to accept a compromise. The next day the battalion moved to a farther camp.

A few people, dependent entirely upon statistics for their information, have believed that the farming districts were not touched by the war, that the great, green country smiled peacefully through it all, hoping only that the allies might have favorable weather for their task. Investigations show few homes that have not suffered the anxiety of waiting, or the grief of loss. Many of the first to go from the cities had been nurtured in the austere discipline of some rocky farm whose meagre income did not appeal to an ambitious young man; or, if the family was large, it behooved some of them to move out and leave a delving-ground for the rest. Nor was the change to military life quite so hard for those who had rubbed against the world in many places, as for the brothers at home for whom the thought of even a training camp had a homesick apprehension.

A boy from a farm back among the hills occa-

sionally dropped into a back seat at the village recruiting meetings. He heard unmoved the argument that he would be handsome in khaki, and listened with cynical but well-concealed amusement to girls who sang, with more zeal for, than appreciation of, the cause, "We don't want to lose you, but we think you ought to go." Then one night the officer made a sincere and rather strong appeal. He didn't minimize the hardships so far as he knew them, and he described the brutalized misery of the invaded countries as graphically as a good imagination could picture it. The boy from the farm listened with little outward sign of emotion, but a battle was going on inside. He didn't go to the platform with the few others who responded to the appeal: he had never stood before a crowd in his life. He was not used to crowds; all his life had been spent in the quiet of the fields, and the long hours of constant, necessary toil had left little time for exploring other places. He didn't know the ways of men in companies, and it would have taken more courage than he possessed to stand up before an audience and take their approval. He waited at the door until the officer came out—and he joined the army. Then he went home.

In the kitchen the fire burned low. A few geraniums had been moved to the table, that they might not freeze against the window-panes. Beside them lay the day's paper and his father's

glasses; the father and mother had acquired a habit of discussing the war news long after he went to bed at night, and he had often wondered why they should be so interested; he knew now. Always on the rare occasions when he was out late, he came in quietly, took off his shoes and went directly upstairs, but to-night he sat on the wood-box, staring at the ashy fire and listening to the regular breathing in the little bedroom off the kitchen. There was only one of these comfortable, sleepy sounds to-night; his mother was awake. After all the sleepless nights she had spent over the family it was hard to think of the vigils she would keep when he had gone. It was hard to think of leaving them with the work of the farm; they were getting old and the mortgage was still hanging over them. It meant hard work and careful living to keep afloat, even with a young man's steady work. They couldn't afford to hire help, even if the help were available, and he could see his father, in the evenings of the next harvest, crippling over the fields, footsore and bent, to bring the cows home for milking. They would be standing at the bars, in the dusk, those cows, lowing and nervous from waiting, as though they wondered why the work was never done. And his mother would come out with the pails, and on into the dark there would be no sound but the regular flow of the milk streams, and the contented breathing of the

animals. The aching loneliness of it! And he, the last of their sons, who had hoped to make things easier, to some day fit up the other house on the place and bring home a girl who would be a daughter to them—after all they had hoped of him, where would he be while they were trying to do his work? Lying out under the sky somewhere, maybe, as powerless to ever help them again, as though he had never been. Yet the recruiting officer had said—and the arguments came back as logical and appealing as when he had placed them before an enthused audience. But to the boy trying to do the right thing, the problem was cruelly complicated.

Then his mother called quietly:

"There's nothing wrong, Jim?"

"No. Did I wake you coming in?"

"I was awake. I guess thinking about the boys, lying out, made me anxious. It's good to know you're in."

She left a good opening for the argument that he couldn't rest at home while the others were "lying out," but knowing her anxiety he hadn't the heart. He would tell her in the morning, and she would accept it as other mothers had done, as motherhood has always accepted things that paid little for its sacrifice. Maybe she would even be proud to be the mother of this manchild who was willing to suffer the inquisition of warfare, with a motive as chivalrous as those

which prompted old-time knights to historic adventures, but in her secret moments, remembering the poignant joy of the hour when she had heard his first cry, and felt the helpless, clinging little body groping toward her and snuggling down safe in the warmth of a protecting presence, she would know that to her he would always be the little child who needed her, and, like thousands of other mothers, she would cry out fearfully and rebelliously, "God, why should these things be?"

It remained with people less personally concerned to express the fitting public appreciation of the county battalion. Mrs. Evison became the leader of a very popular suburban "khaki club," which had neither the time nor the skill to do much sewing or knitting, but by giving a series of fetes and teas and musicales, the ladies raised funds to present the battalion with a set of colors. The presentation was to be made at a garden party on the Evison grounds as soon as the shrubbery bloomed, and it was to be a rather elaborate affair. Some half-dozen more or less prominent men were invited up from the city to speak. The battalion would be there in full strength. A number of Marjorie's dearest girl friends would come out from town to supply the beauty and charm appropriate to the occasion, crosses on the sleeves and a nurse's head kerchief.

There would be a military band and pavilion for dancing. The speakers' platform would be bright with flags and bunting and Chinese lantern footlights, with reserved seats in front for the mothers, and as president of the khaki club, Mrs. Evison would say a few words to them herself.

When the time arrived she did not fail them. People had come in crowds, the presentation had passed off with due ceremony and applause, and her soul was so filled with the perfection of her plans that she wanted to pour out the balm of her appreciation on those women who were "so gloriously sending their sons to fight for the empire and liberty." She was very charming as she stood surrounded by the flags of the allies and a few hot house palms. To make herself beautiful for them she had even risked wearing her loveliest and lowest evening gown, with just the sheerest scarf falling from a bare shoulder, as a protection from the night air. And standing there like a goddess of liberty, she told them that she wished she had a dozen sons to give. She said further that she knew these women who were so splendidly giving their boys would do still more. The food situation was serious, but what women in other countries had done the splendid women on Canadian farms would do. Belgian and French and German and even English women were sowing the seed and gathering the harvest this year; she knew that the dear

mothers from the farms who had so unselfishly given their sons would not see them starve in the trenches, that they would put their shoulders to the wheel as their pioneer foremothers had done, and go into the fields if necessary, to the last one of them.

When she had finished, people from somewhere applauded, the band added its contribution to the clamour, but the mothers sitting down in the shadows, with their boys back in the lines standing rigid and weary at attention, were strangely silent. The speaker gathered her draperies about her, a little elf of a girl handed her a sheaf of roses, and in the general stir which followed, a few of the women from the farms got up a bit stiffly—they were not used to sitting so long at a time—and looked about for their men to go home. It was in the press of the spring work and they hadn't had time to do the milking before they came.

Billy was there, and he had listened with all his logical faculties active. When she finished he began to move towards the gate; it was his last leave and he had plans for the next day which meant a great deal to him. There was more than enough time to catch the car to the city, but he just naturally found himself going. The band had taken a stand close to the pavilion and was starting up a waltz, and, well—it was too much like pouring honey into a cup of hem-

lock. At the edge of the crowd he suddenly found Marjorie right in his path, but looking the other way.

"Oh," she gasped, "you frightened me."

He didn't apologize, because he knew he hadn't frightened her. "I was just getting off to catch the car," he explained.

Miss Evison was disappointed. She had pointed out the good-looking soldier to a few of her girl friends, with a mysterious half-promise of a story, later. She had counted on this evening for days, and had rehearsed several delicate little speeches and a touching, but very proper, farewell. She hadn't anticipated being confronted with a new man. It would have been highly satisfactory if he had shown a sign of the end-of-everything bitterness, generally supposed to be appropriate under the circumstances, but this cool, friendly indifference was more than any girl could stand from a man who had proposed to her not six months before. He was holding out his hand and saying:

"I may not see you again before I go."

She softened at once.

"You're not going yet," she coaxed. "I simply can't let you go yet," and when he showed no sign of staying, she added rather sharply, "I don't believe I ever knew you to be in such a hurry before."

He smiled kindly and happily as one might over an episode of childhood.

"I have to get back to the city," he explained patiently, "We're going out to the country tomorrow."

Miss Evison wasn't used to disappointments and they made her temper very uncertain.

"Are you taking Miss Macdonald with you?" she inquired.

"Yes." He seemed modestly proud that she should guess it.

She was ashamed the minute the question was out, but that he should fail to resent it was maddening, and when she was angry she forgot to be elegant. She was smiling in a way that was not beautiful, and she said.

"You know I wouldn't have thought from the exalted opinion of her you used to have, that she'd have fallen for the soldier stuff."

There was nothing gratifying to her vanity in the way he looked at her. He was angry, of course, but more evident was the surprise of disillusionment. It seemed as though for the first time he saw her as she was and hated to believe it.

"You don't mean that, honest?" he said. He put his big toil-hardened hand on her shoulder, very gently. It was a rather remarkable hand, strong and capable and intelligent looking, and it had steadied many other people to be honest,

but it was unthinkable that he should presume to take such an attitude of fatherly disappointment in her conduct. So she looked at the hand until he took it away, and she said good night with as much dignity as the situation and her temper would allow.

She was still in this frame of mind when she met Dr. Knight a few minutes later, but then she was beginning to know Dr. Knight pretty well by this time, and it was impossible to avoid such things constantly.

"What's the matter?" he inquired casually.

"I had arranged to have Mr. Withers meet the girls, but he seemed to feel that he had other things more important. He's taking Miss Macdonald out to see some farm or something tomorrow. He always did have a craze for that."

Dr. Knight on close acquaintance dropped all his drawing-room talk and expressed some very plebeian views of things. His direct observation now was,

"She's the kind of girl who'd make him a great wife."

"Yes," she agreed, "the kind of girl whom every man advises every other man to marry, but never thinks of marrying himself."

The doctor studied his fiancee with the candid speculation of a man endeavoring to adjust himself to an engagement which somehow seems to

have happened without his planning. He was not ill natured, but perfectly frank.

"What a little cat!" he said.

CHAPTER XIII.

"If you'd just come out with me to the hill place for one day," Billy had pleaded. "I want to have something to take away with me to remember."

Ruth had looked ahead to the day not without foreboding. Why, in the name of all that was sane, she wondered, should a man want to go and uncover the grave of his dreams at a time when he should be fighting to forget them? If he wanted her to witness the agony, of course she would be there—he would need someone—but to see him staring into the ruins of an old house at the ghost picture of the future he had visioned, to know that he was still aching for the nearness of an ethereal bit of thistledown of a girl, and to be unable to tell him just where he had been blind! It would be well if a storm and a flood would wash the place away in the night.

But the storm did not come. The sun shone and the birds sang; the car purred up hills and down; Billy seemed strangely happy, except for an occasional glance of anxiety at the white profile beside him, and the girl was preoccupied and troubled. Something was wrong. It was their last day, and it might have been so wonderful.

"I suppose, if we lived by centuries," Billy remarked, "we would still leave some of the things we wanted most to be crowded into the last day we had. There seems to be something inherently selfish in most of us. We get an idea that we want a certain thing, and if we can't have it we curse Fate for her heartlessness. We never think how our self-centred ambition is hurting someone else, overlooking something worlds better than the trifling thing our fancy has idealized. Whatever failures I might make, Jean would still believe in me, and I've neglected her shamefully.

"It's the same with the work I might have done. A lot of us have been misled by our ideas of 'rural leadership.' We know that the country needs leaders who can see clearly, and who have the courage to make their visions materialize. We have big plans for the country, but we're afraid to go right out to the land and take its risks and steady, commonplace toil. Those of us who grew up there learned something of the beauty and irrevocableness of its natural laws, and a lot of its hardships and cruelties. When we went away to study how to overcome the hard things, which should not be, an insidious influence in the new environment resulted in a kindly ridicule or patient tolerance of the simplicity of these natural laws.

"I remember one day before I ever left the

farm, I was ploughing alone in the field and a lark flew over my head, called twice and disappeared. It was in the spring, and the scheme of things seemed very perfect and simple to me then. That fall I went to college and the artificial crept in. When the war brings men up against elemental things, suffering and quick death and endurance and sacrifice absolutely devoid of self-interest, I wonder if it will give them a higher regard for the genuine in everything. And if it does, will it make them so vastly more primitive, that when it comes to the old human longing for a mate and a home, the kind of woman they want, the woman with dreams and a sensitiveness to the finest things, will find them changed, and be afraid to cross the gulf between them? What do you think?"

"I don't think 'the woman with dreams' has ever been afraid of the natural things." Then she stopped. It seemed simple enough, after his experience, that he should want to dig into such questions for the ease of his own soul, but it was hard to talk about them at all and keep her own feelings covered. So she looked away and very practically broke off. "Anyway no one can see things in generalities; you only know how you feel yourself."

Then she found that he wasn't interested in generalities.

"I'm afraid that's really what I wanted to

know," he said—"how you would feel about it. When the war is over a lot more men will have to go out to the land, if the country is ever to come back to normal again. Some of these men won't be the greatest possible asset to the country; men of all sorts go into the making of an army; but a lot of them will be of the finest type, educated, practical, public-spirited, the kind we need for building a community. Only men alone can't build a community; it requires the indispensable woman, and there's the problem. The men themselves will have learned, under the severest discipline, to endure and cope with hard conditions. They have slept in muddy trenches, they have suffered and survived unthinkable physical hardships; the rigors of agriculture will have no terrors for them. But their wives, or the girls who would be their wives, have been living in refined homes—maybe during the war they have gone without luxuries which they considered necessities in other times; perhaps they have done work they would have thought impossible before; still they have lived in an atmosphere of considerable elegance. It's rather a good thing that they have. If these women would come out to make homes on the land, bringing with them all their essentials of refinement, but dropping the superficialities, what a blessing it would be.

"I can imagine the horror some of them would

feel at the prospect of pioneering in the country, but I know that things out here can be made as safe and comfortable and I hope far more worth while than they can be in any city, if people just have the right material in themselves. We would have less money, but less would be required for the same kind of life. Think what it could be! This place will be mine then, the old house and the trees and all. We could have a bungalow to delight the heart of any architect, and we have ground enough to make a natural park around it. We could have a blazing fireplace as big as a cave with logs from our own woods, and we could make it a centre for other less happy people who needed the warmth of a real home sometimes. We would have our own horses to galavant all over the country, but, best of all, we would always have the cabin to come home to, and time to be alone, to think and talk and learn to know each other. People can't do that where they live in crowds."

Then a quick, troubled look shot over his face. "I had forgotten," he apologized awkwardly, "but there's so little time, and I get so carried away with the idea of having you here, that anything else seems impossible; so I blunder into a visioning like this."

Three years ago she could run her hand through his crumpled hair as she would with a little boy in trouble. She couldn't do that now.

Anyway, she reasoned, it was very different comforting a man for his mother who had died, and for a sweetheart who was flippantly alive and breaking his heart from a distance. She couldn't even look at him. But the old instinct was still there, maternal, protective. She seemed to take on new height with it, and her eyes laughed with a comradely tenderness near akin to tears.

"The whole trouble is you're lonesome, Billy, and it's leading you into dangerous places," she said. "You've set your heart so on living here that you think just the place would make everything right. Don't go away thinking you're losing anything. The place will be here just the same when you come back, and I'll be here. We can come out as often as you like and have no end of good times—but don't you see, Billy, there are some places where you just can't compromise?"

He reddened painfully.

"It's all right," he said. "I know you would if you could, just like you've always done everything else I wanted. But you can't, and I don't wonder. . . . We came out here for a holiday. The woods are all dappled green and sunshine—pine needles under your feet deep as a Donegal carpet. There's a trail winding around for about a mile up to a spring in the rocks. People say the Indians made it, but I think it was some wise old cow finding the easiest slopes

on her way up for a drink. It's like a view from an aeroplane to look down when you get to the top. Shall we go?"

They were not more foolish or more misunderstood than generations of lovers had been before them.

And the girl learned what a day in the woods could be—sun pouring through the parting branches and warming at every touch; brown furry things scuttling off through the dead leaves; here and there a mother partridge strutting out watchful and wary, and whirring close, broken-winged, at sight of them, to lead her brood to cover; stillness like the stillness of an abbey, broken only by the distant drumming of a woodpecker on a hollow tree. And always there was Billy—his sleeve just touching when the path was narrow, his hand so quick and steady when the rocks were slippery. And once, when at the sound of the faintest chirping in a thicket he had stolen over and reached out for her to come and look at a nest of the downiest yellow fledgelings, in the breath-holding wonder of it her fingers had somehow tightened convulsively about his. The birds had done it, of course; but they came home very quietly after that.

But when he left her he said: "There's just one thing more. Will you try to forget me as you must think of me now, and let me try all over again when I come back? You've been no end

kind always—I won't presume on it—but when I come back, if you can stand to have me around at all, I'm going to try to make you love me. And I'm going to keep on trying. And if you ever find you can marry me I'll keep right on after that—and if you can't—it'll be all right. Until I come back, we'll just go right on being pals like we have been? So I can write to you and know you're here, like a warm fire to reach out to when there seems to be no warmth anywhere else. Talk about men protecting women! We're as left as deserted children, when things go wrong, without a woman we can trust, somewhere."

. . . . . .

Ruth's aunt came in to comfort her when he had gone.

"You're going to miss Mr. Withers," she said. "He is a flower of a man. But I'm going to tell you something. You've never had much to do with men; you seem to have always been too busy with your work, and I've been sorry about it; but as things are turning out now it may be as well. Some of our men won't come back; many of those who do come back will be changed. Mr. Withers is naturally likeable; he will be made much of socially, and there's the question of how much of it he can stand. I believe he was a great admirer of that pretty Miss Evison, which is really not a strong argument for his ability to

take care of himself. I'm glad now that you have so much of interest in your career."

CHAPTER XIV.

It was very quiet in the neighborhood after the battalion left. Over the whole green country always known as a retreat from the strain and noise and gaiety of the town, there brooded a quiet that was not restful. Canada was far removed from the areas where every home had been broken, but in the littlest hamlet or the most secluded community there was some home with a cloud hanging over. When Ruth's work took her among these people now, she felt a closer touch with their anxiety; she hadn't known what it meant before.

It was in a Scotch settlement in Eastern Ontario that the real spirit of the war seemed to have entered. She had visited the place during the winter before the war, and the meeting-hall had been filled with young people. They were an interesting crowd—the young men, hardened from summers of harvesting and winters of lumbering, every one of them standing six feet or over, not all modelled after Adonis, but generally bearing unmistakable marks of good breeding and intelligence in their strong-featured faces. It had long been the ambition of every family to turn out at least one university man, if it ran

the farm to the rocks to pay for it, and the others, the elder brothers who stayed at home to fatten the calves that went to buy the books and the dress suits and sundry incidentals of the college course—they had just as active brains, were just as clear thinkers. The houses were not all painted on the outside, but they had libraries of the choicest things in standard literature, and most of the houses had their bagpipes or a violin. From the time when the long evenings set in in the fall until the spring floods broke up the roads the young men and the girls would gather regularly in some farm house and dance all night. The Highland fling was as well known here as in any home in the hills of the Old Land, and when the whole floor wound up the night in the Scotch reel, the drone of the pipes and the whoops of the dancers seemed a very harmless and picturesque way of keeping alive the traditions of their warrior ancestors.

But they were indeed sons of the Covenanters, and with the first surety of war every man who could get away at all wound up his affairs as fast as he could, or left them incomplete, got into kilts if he could find a Highland regiment not filled up, but in any case got into a uniform of some kind, said good-bye to his women folk or his children, a bit roughly and unsteadily at the last, held them painfully close for a minute, then broke away and left them without looking back. The

whole settlement had been left like that, and the farming was now being done by the old men and the young boys and the women and girls.

But the girls had come from the same strain of Covenanter ancestors. They were tall, deep-bosomed, motherly young women with a strength of will and character in their faces like their brothers—and it was war-time. Just as their great grandmothers must have gathered in the sheep when their war-fired men followed the bagpipes over the hills to meet an enemy before their own hearths were dishonored, so their daughters in Canada, with the enemy far away, but none the less menacing if no one went to meet him, took up the tools their soldiers had laid down, and went to farming. Many of these girls had never lifted an axe or driven three horses on a binder before, but they were doing it now, and doing it fairly well. Not that this was work that any Canadian girl could do. These girls had unusually good physiques to begin with; perhaps the canny forethought of their race had made them judicious in what they attempted to do, and there were usually more than one of them in the house, so they didn't have to try to crowd a woman's work into the night after doing a man's work in the fields all day. Anyway, it was their avowed intention to keep it up "until the men came back."

In the winter the girls who in other years had

given their evenings entirely to the neighborhood frolics now sat late beside their lamps at home, knitting. In one community it occurred to them that they could work better together, so they formed a "Next o' Kin Club." Incidentally they sent for Ruth to come and help them get their work better organized.

It was easy to arrange a plan for the most practical kind of Red Cross work. It was not so easy to look squarely at the problems ahead of most of these girls, and offer any solution. But the girls themselves had gone right to the heart of things.

"We've thought it all out," one girl explained to Ruth, a girl with eyes as soft and blue as the heather and a wealth of bronze hair that would have set an artist raving. She was obviously a girl who in normal times had followed the quick, warm workings of her heart rather than to reason out any logical line of conduct. "We've thought it all out, and we want to be ready for whatever happens.

"Andra and I were to have been married in October. At the first word of war he and my brother Donald, a lad just turned eighteen, left together. Father is old and I'm trying to take Donald's place till he comes back. If he shouldn't come I'll stay anyway and do the best I can. Then when Andra comes he'll work the two places; it would be easy for him—you never *saw* Andra. I'm sure he's coming back—somehow you

couldn't think of Andra not coming back. He just wasn't afraid of anything and the things that set other people cowering before them, just naturally made way for him. He always drove the logs over the gorge where every other man in the place thought it was playing with death to go—and when something came loose at a barn-raising and the whole framework seemed ready to come crashing down on the men, he crawled out on a beam with the timbers swaying under him and drove the joint together. Of course they say a man has no chance at all over there; that it's just human life put up against so much machinery; still I can't think Andra won't come back—that just couldn't be," she cried, a terrified protest in her blue eyes. "But he might come back not able to do things like when he went away," she added quietly, "and that's why I want to keep the farm going as well as I can. We could still make a living here; so we could be married even if he couldn't work.

"Oh, don't tell me it wouldn't be prudent," she broke out when Ruth tried to speak. "You never *saw* Andra. If you'd once known the look and the pride of him in his kilt, if you'd seem him taking the logs from a jamb, and the river frothing around him, if you'd known the mind and the will and the kind, true heart of him you'd know that there aren't many men like him left in the world, and you'd know that the greatest mistake would

be that he shouldn't get married—that there wouldn't be any children to grow up like him. So no matter what happens, just so God sends him back to me alive. I'll be waiting.

"That's how most of the girls here feel, but a lot of their lads have been killed. The only hope for them is to have something to do that will make it seem worth while to live. A few of them want to train for nurses, thinking that by trying to ease other people's suffering they can forget their own, but they wouldn't all make nurses, and the life will soon go out of the place here if they all go. If you could plan something worth while for girls to do right here at home, and help the others who feel that they must get away, to find their right place when they do go, it would be worth everything."

It happened when the "Next o' Kin" club were making shirts and bandages at a farm house one day that a pedlar called selling lavender. The people had little use for lavender, but in the warmth of their hospitality they asked the stranger to stay for supper. He was embarrassed by the situation; evidently itinerant selling was new to him, and not congenial. It was also discovered that he was trying painfully to conceal the fact that his right arm hung limp and useless. Then someone noticed that he wore the badge of a discharged soldier, and if Prince Charlie had suddenly appeared in their midst his welcome could not have been more cordial.

He was the first person they had seen who had actually been "there," and the young people, especially, pressed him with questions. Their imaginations had created thrilling pictures of kilted regiments charging over level fields with the sun flashing on their trappings and somewhere, always, the pipes playing; and those who fell would go down smiling. Was it like that, they begged, and had he seen any of their men?

The soldier considered and decided that they deserved to know the truth.

"You'll be gettin' some of them back one of these days," he said, "and you wouldn't want to be expectin' too much of them for a while. I may not have seen any of your men, but I've seen men of the best picked regiments in the army, men who had been there long enough to be hardened to it if that were possible, and I've seen them loaded on to the stretchers cryin' like children. You see it's all so different, you just don't *get* it here at all.

"There was one chap, a sort of leader and general favorite in our crowd. He had been a champion athlete at college and his face would have made a painting of a young Greek god look like a poor copy. They carried him back to the dressing-station one day and sent home a telegram saying that he was wounded in the face. The little girl from home wrote back that he

would be all the more handsome to her with a scar that told of sacrifice and bravery, and the dear knows what else, but she didn't know just what it was. For the rest of his life he'll keep the lower part of his face covered with a black cloth. The question is just how the girl will feel about it after the first shock or the first romantic phase of the incident has passed."

The next day Ruth went into another community. It was a land flowing with milk and honey and humming with automobiles, and except as a live topic of conversation, the war was something apart.

"We've done very well in patriotic work around here," one prosperous citizen explained. "The young people have a patriotic dance every month, and we've raised a lot at entertainments because everyone for miles around has a car and there's sure to be a good turnout if it's for anything patriotic. Then we send donations regularly to the military hospital in the next town; we feel that we owe something to the men there. But the returned soldier is going to be a serious problem. They're going to feel that they've done everything for the country and that the country should take care of them for the rest of their lives. One called here last summer looking for work, but he was all crippled up and couldn't stand anything. A few days ago he went through here again selling perfume or something. Never

saw one yet that could stick at anything. You see they've been idle for so long they'll never settle down again to hard, steady work."

Of one thing he was sure, however—the war must be won. "We've sent a lot of men, but we'll send more," he declared, swelling with pride of his determined patriotism. "We don't want our children and our children's children to have to live under the terror of a repetition of this." What did he think of conscription? Conscription would be a fine thing. There were lots of young men who could be spared, but the government must see that men were not drafted from the farms; the farms were already undermanned. Incidentally, though he didn't express it, with this provision conscription wouldn't touch his own son. It was a strange, but not uncommon, line of human reasoning, and to the girl, pure and strong in contrast, a sentence in Billy's last letter kept recurring: "One virtue stands out through the worst of it; however big a piece of blundering the whole thing may be, so far as the men are concerned the spirit of selfishness is entirely absent." Perhaps it was true that the peaceful little country communities, confined in the shelter of their own hills, sometimes missed the vision of a world-wide public spirit.

And "there were lots of young men who could be spared," the generous one had declared. She thought of the blue-eyed Scotch girl's Andra, and

the young leader and favorite of his mates, who "would have made a Greek god look like a poor copy," and who, for the rest of his life, would keep his face half covered with a black cloth; and she thought of Billy and everything else seemed to end there.

In her settlement work in town when a soldier wandered into the club, homesick on his way to the war, or broken in health returning, it might have been Billy, and she swept him into the warmth of her understanding sympathy almost as his mother might have done. When the doctor said "We might have another mother and baby clinic here every week, if you have time for it," she thought of Billy's mother and the baby who died, and she always had time for it. When the young people's club met on Wednesday evenings and she found some serious-eyed, embarrassed boy isolated by his shyness or falling a prey to an unscrupulous little huntress, she thought of another chapter of Billy's career, and she spared no trouble to align his interests with a real girl. Two years of such personal social service could scarcely fail to be heard of, and by the time the war was over her House and her methods were becoming rather famous. It was one of the city's little recognitions that she should be a member of the delegation to meet Billy's battalion at a formal reception, as it passed through on the way home for demobilization.

CHAPTER XV.

"Chop your own wood and it will warm you twice."

It was all a mistake, somehow, the reception. In his letters to Ruth, Billy had been the same unassuming young Canadian who could find an interest in working every night for a week on so common a thing as a water-wheel; he scarcely seemed a soldier at all. He wrote little of the war, and much about the country, repeating in a hundred ways between the lines his need of her. Now that he was here he was an officer, apparently an inch or two taller than ever—a very military-looking officer, much as he hated it—with women crowding around to pour tea for him, ushering their daughters along to meet him. His eyes were just as honest; he was altogether just as fine. The war had not changed him, but it had changed things for him. One couldn't just imagine him shedding all the smartness of such a uniform and trappings to put on overalls and go to digging a living out of the earth.

"How the army makes them over," Ruth overheard one old lady remark to another. "I fear the girls at home haven't kept up to them. It will be fortunate for some of them if they made no entanglements before they went away."

Billy was standing near when the mayor presented Ruth to the colonel, and he heard his eulogy of her work at the Settlement. To Billy himself the mayor observed:

"That girl has a career ahead of her. There's been nothing like her work elsewhere on the continent. The city will need to watch her, for they're wanting her in other places."

"They would," Billy agreed.

"I believe some fanatic has even had the nerve to suggest that she open some kind of similar centre in the country somewhere, and bury herself out there."

They had just a minute together before the train left.

"It's rotten having to go like this," he said, too perfunctorily, she thought, as though he had said it many times before. "As soon as I can I'm coming back. It's great, the work you're doing. Do you like it very much?"

Very casual it seemed, very different from the high tension of his leave-taking, and she assured him with more enthusiasm than she felt that she did like it very much. And he went off like that without straightening things out. It wasn't like him.

A week later he wrote to her:

"I've been up here in the hills for five days trying to think things out. I have to confess that your civic reception quite knocked me out to be-

gin with, and I've been struggling to see clearly ever since. It wasn't the ceremony of it—I've become quite used to standing in line through all sorts of formalities. The whole trouble was *you*. I didn't miss anything, from the shine of your hair to the tips of your velvet shoes, nor the thoroughbred poise and grace of you, and the same all-seeing kindness of your eyes, and you wore a dress that looked as though it might be wonderfully soft to touch. It would make everyone happier if the women had more of such things up here. I heard all the mayor said about you, about what he called "the future ahead of you," and how some idiot had suggested that you give up your career in town to bury yourself in the country—and everything went blurry. I had even suggested that myself.

"And things didn't look any better when the train dropped me right from the heart of the city on to the platform of the little flag station at Pinehill. The village houses huddled like so many white chickens close about the old grey cheese-factory; the sheds were bright with last year's circus posters, the snow stretched in patches over the muddy fields, like so much linen from a broken clothes-line. There was none of the water-color landscape effect that we always associate with pastoral scenes when we are away from them. This, of course, was a mere accident of time and weather, but out on the farms there

is a real trouble. The farmsteads lack something of the well-groomedness of the days when their owners took a pride in them. The hedges are a bit shaggy; the gates sag here and there. One of the best farms is in the hands of a tenant who 'loves not his land with love far-brought,' and the owner of another lives on it for only two months a year and has no aspirations to fit it up for a permanent home. Pine Ridge, of which I have the honor to be the new owner, is the most dilapidated of all—a veritable scarecrow waiting to have the breath of life breathed into it. Still, I've come back to it like a homesick child, and I don't believe the country ever fails those who trust her.

"I have at least been encouraged in that since I came here. Yesterday I called at the littlest house in the village to get an axe-handle. There's a man there who takes a special pride in making them, smoothing them down at the last with his bare hands like a cabinet worker on mahogany. He is an old man, bent by years of husbandry, but I found him working at his craft with the joyful concentration that an artist puts into a masterpiece. His old wife, bent by years of housewifery and making babies comfortable in the crook of her arm while she worked, bustled about showing me the blooms of her geraniums, and the photographs of her grandchildren. They are, evidently, quite a creditable and promising line of

descendants, especially one lad of twenty years who seems to have inherited the best brain of the family for generations back. His grandfather says the world will hear from him some day, and I don't know why it shouldn't. They are very happy, these old people. I think I know why. They have been a part of the simple, wonderful things that make life; they have made it a contribution that will go on long after their own lives have gone out, so it can never hold for them anything of purposelessness or boredom.

"I've heard a lot about what you're doing. Perhaps you don't know that even back here you're rather famous. It's a sort of glorified social service, isn't it—running a community institute, bringing cultural advantages to those who have missed them, seeing that lonely young people have a good time, finding sweethearts for those who haven't them? I wish someone would start something like that out here. Our need, I can tell you, is as desperate as any down-town settlement's, with its abundance of people and playhouses, and gathering places of a dozen different kinds not two blocks away from anywhere. And that reminds me that when I dropped into the Agricultural Office the other day, the representative told me they were trying to persuade you to come out and open a four-square developing centre for the young people of this county—to carry out among the young people of the farms

the same physical, intellectual, social and spiritual programme that has made such progress in town. And I couldn't enthuse over it at all. I want someone to do it, of course. I think it's the best movement that has ever been suggested for the country yet; but there are going to be a lot of 'movements' in the country during the next few years, and the thing they'll need more than anything else is more people living here to help them along, to make them permanent, something more than a passing demonstration.

"I've been thinking what a glorious 'four-square' plan we could work out in our own little house up here. I've never heard of anyone trying the idea on a home, but that's really where it should begin. Of course, it's the easiest part to square up a house physically, if you know how to use tools, but every day I see houses along the road with constitutions absolutely broken down, and a family still struggling to keep a pulse of life within—weather-boards off, chimneys sagging, summer kitchens straggling off drunkenly at the back. Sometimes there is a solid, square, stone structure, ruggedly upright, but with signs of something wrong inside—windows frozen over like disease-dulled eyes, because there is no warmth within; the whole front presenting a forbidding countenance, when it could be made to smile invitingly by putting on a front porch, lifting the parlor blinds, adding a bay-window at

the side, where the sun could catch it. Our own little house will be small enough, dear knows, but it will be tight against the weather; it will have a stone chimney running up one side—a pillar without and an altar within—and because we don't want to compromise with what we call our 'standards of living,' it will have waterworks before we think of any other luxury.

"In your little pamphlet on intellectual training, I see you have outlined a course of reading. I wonder how much time you get for reading now. Just when you've planned a quiet evening for yourself, do your friends ever call you out to a tea or a show or a bridge party? I can tell you, you have to come to the quiet of a place like this to really enjoy books. I think we even might be able to start a reading circle among our neighbors. I left some magazines with a neighbor's wife the other day, and she quite embarrassed me with her gratitude.

" 'Do you know I haven't seen a woman's magazine since I was married,' she said. 'Joe's the best man in the world'—what confidences have been prefaced by safeguards like this—'but he isn't much for luxuries, and he isn't much company. He'll sit for hours smoking or figuring and when he does talk it's mostly the crops or the taxes. It isn't his fault; he was like that when he used to come to see me. I've known him to sit for a whole evening without saying much more than to ask

if we'd noticed the cows failing since they went on the grass. You don't notice that so much for an evening once or twice a week, but when you have to live with it day in and day out it's terrible. The doctor says my nerves are bad and that I've got to go away for a change, but with three small children one can't pick up and go away. Anyway, I wouldn't leave Joe alone with no one to do for him. I'll tell the doctor to prescribe some good reading and I'll get my change at home.'

"But what a shame it is that you couldn't have had a chance at four-squaring Joe when he was younger and more plastic. There are other boys here with the same need. Just now the church is getting up a concert to help 'raise the stipend,' and it is the custom to have a two or three act play, usually a comedy, which necessitates the entertainment being taken from the church to the Orange Hall. I wish you were here to help them create a pantomime from 'The Hanging of the Crane.' I want to go over it with you myself to see again just how wonderful some of the pictures are.

"I know about the social work you're doing—keeping open house with a grate fire on snowy, dusky Sunday afternoons, and bringing lonely young people in for supper. We would have a grate fire here too, and we could find people just as lonely.

"Our neighbor down the road has a daughter, very bright, and actually suffering for young friends and a 'good time.' He won't let her go to the dances in the Orange Hall, in which his judgment may be sound enough, only he doesn't try to find a substitute for this diversion, and the neighborhood provides nothing else. Some miles in the other direction we have another neighbor, a young man just starting to farm for himself. Whether Angus goes to the hall or not, I don't know, but if he does he must have some trouble supplying conversation in the intervals between dances. He gets on much better talking about Sir Walter Scott and politics and the habits of bees, . . . If we could bring them home here some Sunday afternoon I don't suppose they would speak ten words to each other, but he would take her home afterwards and a few nights later we would see a light in her parlor window, an entirely new occurrence, and considered quite an omen in the neighborhood.

"And how the neighbors here would welcome you. You would find the social life very different; but there's something very genuine about it. They would not drop in for a formal call after they were sure you were completely settled. You would possibly find a woman climbing the hills in a snowstorm the first day after you arrived, bringing a jar of black currants and wanting to know if she couldn't help you hook a mat or

quilt a quilt. I think we could give our house a social squaring here that it might miss anywhere else.

"A few years ago I would have been frightened and embarrassed at the responsibility of trying to establish a spiritual corner in my house or in myself. The square idea makes it seem the most practical, natural thing in the world, and then there is some inspiration in seeing the lack of it. In the mountains skirting off from the farmlands here there is a settlement that is a little kingdom of heathenism such as one might find in a country where no churches exist. I am told that almost every county has such a nest somewhere within its boundaries and that it seldom appeals to anyone as a home mission field. The people just naturally run to wickedness and break every commandment shamelessly. This is one extreme. The other is not much less serious. In a lot of the 'solid old farm homes' there is a rigid dominance of a thing called religion which is not beautiful nor compassionate nor consistent. Children suffer under it and grow up to hate the name it stands for. Old Jonas Birchfield had a tractor cutting wood at his place last week, and his son, in some way, broke a delicate part of the engine. They worked at it until noon with the old man's wrath growing hotter every minute. I dropped in with the mail just as they were sitting down to dinner and overheard Jonas shouting: 'It just

seems you've been sent to aggravate me. I've tried every way to teach ye and ye get stupider every year. I'll be glad when the day comes that ye're old enough to turn on the road, and I'll never see yer cursed face again. Now after dinner ye can walk the six miles to town and get a new bolt—Bless, we pray Thee, Lord, a portion of this food, etc., etc.—Maybe that'll get some of the gum out o' your brain. And mark ye, ye don't get to school another day till ye've cut enough wood with the axe to pay for the bolt, often enough to teach ye a lesson.'

"I suppose Jonas thought he was giving his family something of a Christian environment by repeating that blessing at every meal, regardless of the spirit pervading the house at the time. But they won't know much about such promises as 'Like as a father pitieth his children,' will they? I don't know much about it myself, but it would be wonderful to help keep other children from missing it. I'm glad you've made it so clear how the Christ way of living can be such a practical thing, even in a little farm house.

"Perhaps I should hesitate to even want you out here. There are a lot of 'advantages' in town, I suppose. I remember in our college days, we used to make a great deal of the cultural value of higher life, operas, travel, books and the like. Seems to me we were far too content to take our thrills at second hand. There are no operas here,

but there's an abundance of material to start a community theatre. I'm not an acting man myself, but a girl who has conducted a dramatic campaign in a down-town settlement could set a powerful leaven working. Anyway there's a mine of unexplored dramatic interest up here. In lieu of the social tangles ravelled out in the shows, you can see how the Great Author planned the miracle of life with the creatures of the woods. There's a red-crested bird just arrived with his mate from the South last week, and they seem to be in trouble. I went to sleep last night listening to him calling low in the bushes and she never answering. But I know it's going to come out all right—there's no reason why it shouldn't, because there are only the two of them concerned. Nature doesn't mix up in triangular affairs. If you could come out right away you might be in time for the last act. I whittled out a house from a piece of log last night and set it on the gate-post, and I think at the rate they're getting on, they'll be moving in about the day after this reaches you.

"To-morrow I want to commence work on the bungalow fireplace. It's to be a great stone cavern with boulders broken from the side of our own hill and a heavy oak timber hewn from a log in our own woods. And on the edge of the mantel I want to whittle out the words, *'Chop Your Own Wood and It Will Warm You Twice.'*

That much I've learned from experience—the glow that comes from earning a thing before you take it. You feel it when you build your own house, or plant your own trees and wait for them to grow, or when you work in some community move to help your neighbors—most of all I think in the last; there are so few of us out here and we need each other so badly. I can't help thinking what a stupendous lot a girl with your experience and—and everything, could do for the place.

"We're beginning to make plans for our spring operations, deciding whether to plant one hundred or two hundred acres of wheat, whether the price of corn is going to make it worth while to raise hogs. It's as full of adventure as a gamble in stocks, the chance a farmer takes with blight and drought and flood and uncertain markets, but there's always the promise of the year ahead, of seed-time and harvest, and the wonderful satisfaction of knowing that agriculture is one of the few industries the world couldn't do without.

"But after all, important as it is to produce food for the world's need, instinctively a man plans for other things. Early this morning I started up the mountain to get out some stone for the house foundation. The sun was just coming up, and when I stood for a few minutes, sort of at the top of the world, wondering at the distance and stillness and the unexplored beauty of it all, a bird, possibly a descendant of the one that

startled me at my ploughing fifteen years ago, flew over my head, called a few times and flew away. And I wanted you. At night I came back to the house and the emptiness was awful, and things troubled me, but through the smoke of my pipe I could see you sitting there, with the fire making lights in your hair, and your eyes starry and thoughtful in the dusk, and I wanted to take your hands in mine and hold them out to the blaze, *and I wanted to ask you what you thought about the things that worried me.* That's the worst of it with you women who have other interests—you would make such ripping companions for a man. There it is, you see—the man's old primitive hunger for his mate and his home. It's more urgent out here than in town. Suppose we had lots of money and went into an up-town house. I'd pay people to do things for you, and you'd direct them to do things for me, and a lot of the personal communication would be cut off. Out here, a man and a woman need each other more.

"So, very humble, but unashamed—if you get the difference—I'm coming down for you. Try to be waiting for me."

. . . . . .

His first, swift look told him she was waiting. There would be no more wondering and questions and misunderstandings.

"Just what was the trouble the other day?" he asked. "If you're not sure in any way, we'll get it cleared up now."

And very frankly, with no vein of coquetry, she told him:

"I was afraid of you."

This was incredible. Whatever feeling anyone might have had regarding him, he was sure no one had ever been afraid of him. And she, of all people! Why, the truth was, he was appallingly afraid of her, himself, only he would have called it by another name. It was the thing that made his touch fearful of crushing her feathers, that a poet would say "kept the soul of him kneeling" in her presence. Then the wonder of it dawned on him. Surely she didn't care that way!

He hadn't learned that there was no other way.

CHAPTER XVI.

"God's outposts are the little homes."

So much can happen between the kindling of fires in hearts and on the hearth of a new household. It is such a shy, questioning, never-to-be-repeated time, filled with the anxiety to understand, and the keener anxiety of holding the mirror to one's own soul to better see its appalling unworthiness.

"The house must be ready by fall," Billy said. "I'll have the men at it in the morning."

"But they'll want boards and plans and stones, and lots of things," his wife-to-be protested. "They'll know you're going to get married, and if they aren't too sorry for you, I'm afraid they'll laugh at you."

"They can start digging the cellar, anyway. Surely they'll have sense enough to know that any house has to have a cellar. Could—couldn't we make some kind of plan to-night—something for them to begin on? From March to October is a long time to wait. It might make it seem a little nearer just to get it on paper."

Ruth had always wanted to plan a house. She had always been planning them, theoretically, in her dream castles, and technically in her pro-

fession—but there was something very different about this one.

"This is the one thing we're sure of—the chimney," Billy was saying, blocking it out awkwardly on the back of an envelope. "Now what do you want?"

"Why, really, nothing much at all," she stammered. "I—I'm afraid this is a bad time to plan a house. It's all so new—so wonderful, somehow—it seems it wouldn't ever make any difference where we live."

"You think that wouldn't stand in the way so much after a while?"

"No, but—you remember all those houses you passed on the road? The ones with frost over the windows, and the kitchen straggling off at the back, and no porches? After all I've believed a house should be, it seems we could just move into any of those and the things that were wrong wouldn't matter at all."

And then she saw something in his eyes that even she had never discovered before—a look incredible with wonder and gratitude and tenderness, and a smile back of it like the warmth of a fire that would always be there to reach out to. It was the only way Billy had of saying certain things.

"But since Nature doesn't make any concession to such a sentiment, lovely as it is," he reminded her, "we might find pneumonia lurking in the

house with frosty windows, and a worn-out shred of a woman, crying, in a heap at the foot of the straggling kitchen steps some day. We want our house—what is it you call it?—'physically sound.' . . . We still have nothing but a chimney. Where do you want the living room, and all the other things I've heard you talk about? We can spread out all over the lot, you know. That's the beauty of a home in the country; you don't have to worry about the limitations of frontage or the proximity of your neighbors' walls shutting out the light. Only, the two old pines will be here, and here. They'll just naturally stand like pillars at each corner. They've been waiting for the house for a long time, and when the wind comes up at night I've heard them start with a low, cooing little shiver and work up to a perfect wail about it. I hope you won't mind the noise they make. I think it's about the knowingest sound I ever hear when I'm very lonely or very happy. I remember hearing someone say that it was like a lost soul crying, or something like that; but I imagine you'd like it. Why, I believe you first taught me to listen to it—the night we drove past the place after our 'power demonstration.' Do you remember?"

He remembered it now, very happily, himself, but events between had not quite blotted out other details of the time, and he added, shamedly,

"Heaven must have a special company of angels whose sole duty is to take care of fools."

They weren't making much progress with the plan. He had watched her draft house plans and remodel them for her classes, shifting rooms here and there with the ease and interest of a child playing with blocks. For some reason she seemed afraid of this one.

"We won't want it very big," she said.

"Because you're fearful of the mortgage? But a farm house has to be built for permanence, you know. It generally stands for years and years. You don't move out every first of May. That's why it should be so much better planned than a town house—you have to look farther ahead."

Then he took from his pocket a yellow, much-folded sketch copied from one of her blackboard drafts for the classes years ago—just after he had first become interested in houses.

"How would this do?" he asked.

She recognized it, happily.

"You liked that? I'm so glad. I believe I was drawing that house for you even then."

"You knew—then?"

"No, no. I didn't think of it ever being *my* house. I think I couldn't have drawn it if I had. But I knew what a house would mean to you, and I was building it for you. It was the very best I could do. Why, I never could have thought of a

house, with everything in it like that, if I hadn't been planning it for someone, could I?"

He didn't just get it all at once. She "knew how much a house would mean to him"—a house "with everything in it, like that." Well he knew every detail of it, from the great stone fireplace in the living-room and the little bookcases under the windows—a thought for all the precious intimacies of family life—to the den looking out over the valley and the sun-porch for a baby. He considered them gravely now while she drew meaningless squares and circles about the chimney and the two pine trees on the back of the torn envelope. Then he took the distracting jumble away and gathered her close.

"That was too wonderful of you," he said. "Shall we leave it just as it is?"

She nodded without looking up. Then she smiled into his eyes, the same old, comrady smile. After all he was just Billy—the same delightful directness, the same steady eyes, clear to the depths, the same unfailing dependableness, the same infinite understanding.

But he did a strange thing when he went home that night. It was long past midnight when his car climbed the hill and turned in at the road gate. The moon was high and the shadows of the pine trees lay like black pools on the grass. He was not a sentimentalist, but he brought a spade and turned the first earth for the foundation of

the new house himself. Then he sat down on the fallen timbers of the old house and looked off across the country to where the ruins of another old house lay rotting in the marshes of the Swamp Farm.

It had been such a pitiful venture, the founding of that house. It wouldn't have mattered that it had failed economically; many of the happiest families in the world had come through poverty together. But that there should be no trust, no confidence, no hope—nothing but a brooding fear where there should have been a fortress of refuge!

"We could not love the world so much if we had had no childhood in it," he had read and questioned. He could still feel the warmth of the sun on his back as he sat for a brief half-hour on the bank of a creek, fishing; the coolness of the earth under his bare feet when he first shed his shoes in the spring. He remembered vividly the poignant elation at the discovery of a bush of ripe blackberries in a hidden fence corner. Yet his childhood was something which he would always be trying to forget. It came back to startle him in his dreams sometimes, even yet. It wasn't fair—a person had only one childhood—but his mother had lived her whole married life in this atmosphere, and had gone out bravely trying to keep a stream of sunshine about the place for the rest of them, self-forgetful to the last.

Perhaps she didn't know how prevailing the

effort would be—not by what she taught them, but by what she was. By the uncounted sacrifices she had made to give them a chance, their ways had been cast in safe and pleasant places. Here was a heaven on earth opening for him. Jean was happy and interested in a career of her own, and recently, just as happy when the county Agricultural Representative craved her interest in another direction. The mother who had made it all possible had done it single-handed, working desperately to construct a sailing craft for them out of the wreckage of her own life.

He wondered, dreamily, what it would mean to a boy to have a father who cared as much as that.

"Of course, everything will be as happy here as wanting-to can make it," he reasoned. "It would need to be. We're generally so stupid with the people we love. But it ought to go farther than that. Perhaps out here, where we have no settlement houses as centres of things that should exist for everyone, there may be a mission for a few more real homes."

"Bury herself in the country, when the world needs her so much," the mayor had said. "So far as the *need* goes," he soliloquized, "I needn't have worried over bringing her here."

CHAPTER XVII.

"A tribal mind came into existence. Man had entered upon the long and tortuous and difficult path toward a life for the common good, with all its sacrifice of personal impulse, which he is still treading to-day."—H. G. Wells in The Outline of History.

They gipsyed about through the country a lot that summer. The task of getting the neglected farm into bearing shape was a man-size job, and often, after a day in the fields, Billy worked until the last light faded, clearing away odds and ends to hasten the speed of the builders next day, especially building in the stone fireplace with his own hands—that was a joy he had always promised himself. But there were other days when he quit work early, took a plunge in the river at the foot of the pasture, dressed in outing clothes and motored into town.

On these occasions, a cartoonist in search of a subject for his next attack on farmers in politics would not have looked a second time at the sunbrowned young man with his swinging stride and crisp hair-cut. He seemed to break every established tradition of his class, not even loitering before the bills of movie stars and jaded stock companies, but transacting his business with despatch, then driving down a shady street

in the boulevarded residential section. He always stopped very quietly before a deep, dark stone house, took the steps with a bound, and rang with the shyness of a lover making his first call. He could never quite get over this. And a girl always met him just as quietly, with eyes just as eager to tell him she had been waiting for him. In spite of all that the actresses in the social game believed of the fascination of uncertainty, it held him like a lode-star, this constant declaration. He would have been as fearful of losing it by failing an iota of what she believed of him, as he would fear to lose the trust of a child by striking it down. It was easy to understand, now, why the fabric of family life held so safely sometimes.

Toward evening they usually left the city to follow winding roads through orchards and meadow lands. They were rich with many charms, these excursions—the faint, elusive scent from raspberry bloom and uncut clover, stirring in the night air; the occasional sleepy tinkle of a cow-bell, a lamb bleating back to the flock, or a mother calling her children in for the night; here and there a lamplighted house close to the road, blinds undrawn, showing the little group within; an old man and woman sitting in a seat they had built for themselves outside their little gate that they might not miss anything of the world going by them—the simple, vital

dramas of life flashing past with every mile of film of the open country.

The Agricultural Representative, observing Billy's nomadic habits, tore out of the office after him one day and called him back.

"It seems to me, if you have so much time for running around, as no other decent farmer in the neighborhood has," he remarked, "you might as well be running to some purpose. I have a lot of school plots to judge at odd points through the county. By driving a few miles out of your way each trip, you might be able to make the work interesting for yourself, and it would save the time of a man who really has something to do. I thought perhaps, if you were on your way to the city, you might call for Miss Macdonald and take her along. It would give her an opportunity to do some of the research work she'll need when she comes out to help in the office here."

And he grinned the wider when he saw that the suggestion stirred only a response of pity.

"Sorry you had counted on that," the generous one replied. He felt that he could afford to be compassionate.

Their first judging trip took them to a neighborhood far back from the town. A group of three houses banked close to a railway siding, a post office, a blacksmith shop and a farm house marked the centre of the community, with well-tilled farms all about. The school was there,

too, but something that was evidently an addition to the building arrested their attention.

But the thing didn't look like a new building. Stranger still, it was set on wheels. On closer view, it was frankly and simply, a passenger coach from the railway, apparently a derelict for travelling purposes, stranded in the centre of a grass-grown school-yard, flying a flag, and docilely bearing the inscription "Nestleville School Annex—1921."

They climbed up and looked in at the windows. There it was—seated, blackboarded along one side, a room equipped to take care of some forty children.

"Now, I wonder how this happened. For the sake of the research work you're supposed to be doing, wouldn't you like to drop in on Mrs. Terryberry and get her to tell you about it?" Billy suggested.

Mrs. Terryberry was delighted to tell them about it. A busy enough farmer's wife, she could find time to drop her work for a chat at any hour of the day, and she could always catch up with the time she had lost before the day ended. A half-hour's gossip revived her like a refreshing sleep, strangely enough, since she did all the talking herself. She met them at "the little gate" when they drove up the lane, ushered them into the house, in spite of their protests, and settled them and herself comfortably in her cool, herb-scented

parlor. Before she launched on such a story she liked to get her feet up a little on a hassock—she had been on them all day—her white apron well spread, and her sturdy arms lying comfortably across her generous waist-line.

"You see, we had needed a bigger school for years back and the trustees always said the section couldn't afford one. Finally it got to the place where the little ones were to be allowed to come only half a day, and the children from back on the mountain, who needed schooling the most, were to be shut out altogether. It was then the Women's Institute got into it. When this order came up we knew the thing couldn't wait any longer, and we called a meeting about it. Someone thought of the old car that had been standing on the siding for years, waiting for the company to haul it away for firewood, and we got right up from the meeting and went across in a body and looked it over. Some of the seats were broken but the walls were solid as a church. We got the trustees out to look at it, and we sent two of them down to see the agent in the city—we didn't go ourselves because we're old-fashioned women up here, and we don't believe in women running things. The company said we could have the car for nothing; so the institute made a bee—that is, we invited the men to it, and they brought their teams and hauled the car down to the school. The women fixed it up ready for the children to move into it.

"The next thing we wanted to do was to start a hot lunch for the children. Some of us had gone down to Toronto to the Institutes' convention, and heard how the city schools had brought ill-nourished children up to strength by giving them hot cocoa at noon. Well, we came back home and we said to ourselves, if those children needed a drink of hot cocoa at noon, surely our children, that walked a mile or two miles to school through rain and snow, and carried a cold dinner with them—surely they would be the better for it too. We hadn't any equipment like they had in the city—no domestic science kitchen with nice little gas plates and aluminum ware, but I lent my tea-kettle and Mrs. Applegath lent her dish-pan, and every child brought its own cup and spoon; the institute bought the sugar and cocoa and the parents sent the milk, and it all worked so well that this year we've bought dishes and a coal-oil stove with an oven, where they can bake potatoes and such. And if the children here aren't as well nourished as the best they have in town, it won't be our fault."

She told them of other equally ambitious ventures—how the cemetery had been a real disgrace to the place until the women got at it, planned a stumping-bee to clear away the brush, inviting the men with their teams and giving them a good dinner "to make it sociable," how

they had taken flower seeds and slips from their geraniums and planted flowers on every grave they could find, and how Jim Black and Huldy Adams, who hadn't spoken since their fathers quarrelled over their rights to water their cattle at the creek that ran between their pastures, had gone home reconciled because Jim saw Huldy down on her knees planting a border of sweet alyssum around his father's grave-stone.

She was loath to let them go. She had many other things to tell them. And when they finally did convince her of their necessity to be away, she followed them to the gate, her bare, capable arms rolled in her apron, and she watched with interest while Billy extricated a coat, evidently his own, from the back seat of the car, and buttoned the girl into it. Such attentions had long ago slipped out of her own life, nor did she particularly miss them; but she could enjoy their observance in the lives of others just as she enjoyed the weekly instalment of breath-taking romance in the local newspaper.

"Well now!" she breathed, when the rite had been performed, "I hope, Miss Macdonald, you'll get a man that'll always be as kind to you as that."

"I hope so," Ruth acknowledged, humbly.

"Oh, she will," Billy hastened to put in, for some reason addressing himself quite as much to Ruth as to the other woman.

"Well, now!" the inquisitive one exclaimed again, her brow clearing. She had found out what she wanted to know. "I fancied so, I'm real glad to hear it. I think you'll get on fine."

She watched them out of sight—a curious, kindly gossipy soul, whose interest in other people gave a color to her own life and harmed no one.

They found others like her, bringing hope and happiness to their own little corner of the world in a way that a whole army of professional sociologists could never do it. Stopping to ask for a drink at a cabin at the end of a mountain road one day, they found the woman bending over a flat, heavy box that had just come in on the stage. She glowed with excitement.

"It's our travelling library," she explained. "This is the third one we've had, and it's the best yet."

Oblivious to the strangers for a minute, she fingered the worn volumes caressingly.

"Here's Carman's 'Making of Personality,' I hoped they'd send that. And, Oh, Sonny," she called to a tow-headed, blue-overalled boy hovering shyly and eagerly in the doorway, "here's 'Nicholas Nickleby.' He has just finished 'The Old Curiosity Shop'," she remarked casually. "He should have all of Dickens read by the time he's sixteen."

"Where do you get them?" they inquired.

"The Institute gets them from the government. They are always left here because this is on the stage road. Some of the women have to come five miles for their books, but we try to help each other by leaving them half way whenever we can. We trade them around like our mothers used to exchange their home-made yeast."

Finally she came to, apologetically. She made tea for her guests and talked to them about books. The living-room of her shining little house opened to the out-of-doors at the front, and at the back, with tiny bedrooms at the sides, but it was a centre of refinement, from the clean scrubbed floor to the pictures on the walls. These, too, she had acquired when the women ordered a collection from an art catalogue to decorate the school. They had cost a few cents each, and her husband had whittled out little wooden frames for them. A special place of honor above the book-shelves, was given to the famous "Hope."

"I had seen that picture often enough, years ago," she remarked, "but I never knew what it meant till we came up here and the frost killed our crops three years in succession, while we still had faith in good years to come. The one unbroken string and the one star in the sky were very familiar to us for a long time. . . . We like that picture very much."

Another evening, coasting along a quiet road some miles from town, a section without a village

centre anywhere, they came to a little hall with automobiles parked around it, but no light in the window. Billy went to investigate and came back a bit dumbfounded.

"They're having moving-pictures," he reported. "Strictly high-class stuff. 'Lorna Doone' is the attraction to-night, and next week it's to be 'The Merchant of Venice'—a joint scheme of your ubiquitous Women's Institute and a farmer's club. If we would go a little farther back from town we might possibly drop in on a radiophone concert somewhere along the way. For your research observations, I would inform you that one object of the picture scheme here is to run a counter-attraction against the influence of a very depraved movie theatre in the next town. I imagine they're getting somewhere, too. When I was coming out, a boy of about sixteen or so asked me if I knew where he could get the book 'Lorna Doone.' I wonder if he'll want to start in on Shakespeare after next week."

And with the old, recurring pain, he remembered how avidly another sixteen-year-old boy had devoured a collection of paper-backed novels left at the Swamp Farm by an itinerant hired man.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"I stand where the cooling breeze from the hills
Meets the draught from the furnace heat,
And lonely eyes from the cabins far
Trace the lights of the city street.

"I hear the throb and the laugh of life,
While violets bloom at my feet,
For, oh, there is much to gain and to give
Where the town and the country meet."

It was on a journey in another direction, one cool spring evening at sundown, that they met another surprise. Rounding a curve in a level, wooded road they met a party of some dozen boys dressed in the briefest of gym. suits and running shoes, trotting along with the easy poise of practised runners. They might have been a group of college athletes out training for their annual meet, but one would scarcely expect to find them twenty miles out from town. Meeting a native of the locality jogging along with a heavy farm horse and sulky, Billy stopped to ask if he knew where the boys came from.

"Oh, I know where they come from, all right", was the grim response. "I know where they're goin', too, if this sort of thing keeps up. They're boys raised within three miles of here, every one of them, though we never aimed to start a circus of our own till Sam Brown's boy come home from college. Old enough to know better, too."

"What did he do?"

"What did he do! Got it into his head that he was Longboat, apparently, and every night about dusk he'd come out half stripped, and he'd run around the block. He got away with it all right, too, till one night I was drivin' through Dead Man's Swamp and all at once this long, white shape of a man come lopin' along. The horse gave one snort and bolted, and was all but away when he caught the bridle, 'whoah'-in' and 'steady'-in', and speakin' as natural as if he was after the plough instead of leapin' over the roads at night like a tame kangaroo. But I gave him a piece of my mind that I guess he won't forget. I gave him fair warning that if I ever caught him at such pranks again, I'd see him in the asylum where he belonged. He acted ashamed enough about it at the time, but they say he still goes out just the same. I haven't been down that way at night since. Worse still, he's got all the younger fellows at it now, and the whole neighborhood's got so callous to it that even the horses don't shy at them no more."

They called and asked the Representative about it on their way home.

"They're young Brown's Tuxis boys," he told them. "The neighborhood has needed such a man for a long time. I tried to organize a class in agriculture up there two years ago, and I couldn't get any response at all. There was a

little store and 'stopping house,' that was about the worst hang-out for boys that I have ever seen. In the winter a run-down, semi-professional hockey player came in on the pretext of coaching a team, and supplied about every undesirable influence that they hadn't had up to that time. The boys from the farms around were getting in just about as deep as the village crowd. No person going in occasionally could hope to do much, but when Brown came home he went right after it, and the boys follow him like sheep. They asked for a course themselves this year, and I couldn't have had a better class of boys if I had hand-picked them. I believe Brown has a very live Bible class composed largely of boys who used to spend most of their Sunday afternoons smoking behind the barn. . . . It just demonstrates the same old truth over again, that no good movement will ever get anywhere in a community, unless there are some people who care about it right on the ground. As we've agreed before, what the country needs is more people—of the right kind."

"How about the city people who come out?" Billy inquired casually. He was brazenly proud of what he would do for his own community in this regard.

"Wonderful, the Representative replied; "wonderful. They must sometimes find the people they have to live with very trying, though."

"Which remark quite justifies the criticism I have heard of some Agricultural Representatives—that they have no sympathy with farm people. What were you going to say about your commuters?"

"One family I have in mind weren't just commuters, though they weren't actually year-round, out-and-out residents. A neighborhood loses something, of course, in the family that goes to town for the winter, but the point I want to make is that sometimes we get a certain breadth of view from experience in the city. This happened in Haven Hollow. Perhaps you don't know the place, but to drive through and see it, with its green fields and blue sky, and a quiet broken only by sheep bells and birds and children's voices, you would expect it to be the most safe and peaceful little cup of a world on the face of the earth. You would expect it to be filled to the brim with all the old, sterling virtues of honesty and neighborly love—and in all the outward signs and tokens it was, but the Hollow had a besetting sin of its own. It was distrustful and cruelly critical of anything it did not understand. The object of its criticism might be something new in the schools or the government or the very personal affairs of its neighbors. A typical case is reported of one woman who had knit socks for the Red Cross, and also sent boxes of clothing to the sufferers in the fires of North-

ern Ontario and Halifax. A few months afterwards, she explained to her friends that she had put a card with her name and address in the box that went to New Ontario and she had a nice letter back from there. She had forgotten to put her name in the box that went to Halifax, and she received no letter back from there. She supposed the Red Cross officials had gotten hold of her box and that the Halifax people never saw it at all.

"Things were going like this when the new family bought a strip of land on the river-front and built a summer home on it. They had seen the Hollow from a train window and thought it would be a nice, peaceful spot to retire to. They were very popular; they opened their house for all sorts of community gatherings and all went merry as a marriage bell till Poppy Andrews came home for a visit.

"Poppy had left the Hollow ten years before to study music—a very clever, level-headed girl, they say. A few years later she married a man who sang like a nightingale and kept his marriage vows like a beetle, and Poppy got a divorce. You can imagine the dust that would stir up in the Hollow. They took it as a public disgrace, and Poppy had been ostracized ever since. The new family took her in as they did everyone else; only the woman seemed to have a particular fondness for her. The rest of the Hollow was alarmed

about it, especially the woman who was always ready to shoulder the responsibility of going to people with painful gossip under the pretext 'I thought you ought to know.'

"The interview, as I heard of it, was interesting. 'Oh, yes, I know' the woman interrupted before she had fairly started her story. 'It was the only right thing for her to do, don't you think? If she were your daughter, now, what would you want her to do?'

" 'But she wasn't my daughter.'

" 'Nor mine, because unfortunately I never had a daughter, and we never know what we'd do in any experience until we find ourselves in a corner with that same experience offering us just one of two ways out. But I believe I understand something of what Poppy meant when she said: 'You know it isn't facts as they are that trouble me. I thought it all out before and I know it was right. And I can stand the eyes of the Hollow staring at me like a pack of ravening wolves. They have a right to look, and I can look back at them because I've nothing to hide. But you remember the picture of the Russian slave with the pack closing in on him? It wasn't their smouldering yellow eyes, but their bright red tongues that were the cruelest'. . . . Strange such a thing should get into the child's head, isn't it?

"The woman still continues to be popular in the Hollow, and she has done more to create a community spirit by her breadth of view and generous, kindly judgments than all the little clubs and cliques the people had before she came."

So it became their custom to go out and explore the surface signs of a neighborhood, and come back to have the Representative interpret them. It was in an old-settled, prosperous section, generally known as the Eden of the county, that they discovered a sinister lack of something beneath the well-ordered beauty of the farmlands. The fields bloomed with a heavy tangle of clover, because they were rich from years of good farming. The stone fences were monuments to the industry of the pioneers. Long avenues of maples, set out half a century ago, led back from the road gates to big brick houses, and lilac bushes that a grandmother had planted grew rather too thick and high at the cellar windows. Skimming over the smooth stone roads at the hour of sundown, they marvelled at the stillness, the order, the substantial, weatherworn dignity of the old farmsteads. Prosperity brooded over the land, if not like a benediction, like an absolution from any concern for the future. But there were no barefoot children rioting over the lawns, no little, new houses of the kind people build when they are "starting," no crowds of young people chat-

tering in the lobbies of the churches, nothing primitive or youthful—but the lack of them seemed like a danger signal, somehow. Birchfield, unknown to itself, might be on the verge of an era of decadence.

They asked the Representative about it.

"Birchfield," he said, "is not different from many another neighborhood that lives in its past. I know its story best through Peter Summers, for the community in general, as you can imagine, does not feel the need of either service or interference from the agricultural office. I've always liked Peter tremendously, though. The community may be like others of its kind, but Peter, even if he has lived there all his life, is different. I suppose anyone who has much in the way of character, either good or bad, is 'different' to those who know them. Peter lived on one of the oldest, finest farms in the section—an only son. It would all be his as soon as he was ready to take it over. Every plan his father made for the future of the estate, he would preface with the statement 'When Peter gets married,' as naturally as if he said 'When the wheat comes into head'; but that was as far as it ever went. I suppose Peter had known it was spring as often as any other young man of his age, but if he did he kept it to himself.

"There was really no one to whom he could be expected to tell it. Peter's social experience, so

far as girls were concerned, had been rather circumscribed. The young women he knew were just the grown-up little girls who had gone to school with him. He had seen them regularly ever since, at church and at every neighborhood gathering. In fact they had been in his sight so constantly that he never had a respite to see that they were grown up. Other young men had noticed it, and many of the same girls had married and left Birchfield without causing his pulses to quicken or retard for a second. He had a whole colony of cousins up country, and another branch of the connection in town. He met them all at family reunions and anniversaries, but they were—well, cousins.

"Of course, Peter hadn't lived a starved young life. To begin with, there was the beautiful old brick house and his mother. Mrs. Summers is the gentle domesticated, motherly type of woman who looks first and always to the ways of her household and the comfort of her men folk. With her white hair, and low voice and lavender-flowered afternoon dresses, she would just naturally lull a man into contented ways about the house. And in order that Peter might have girl's society at home, or to encourage his interests in that direction she used to invite the nicest girls she knew in to tea, but they were all old friends, the cousins and the neighbors, who seemed even more like cousins.

"Personally, Peter didn't suffer. He had other hobbies. In his big front room upstairs he had a bookcase filled with the best standard books, from Shakespeare down, and he was familiar with all of them. Also he had a violin. He seldom brought it down to the family living-room but alone in his sanctum upstairs it was like a living companion. On summer evenings, when the windows were open, the neighbors would sit on their verandas and listen for Peter's violin. It seldom disappointed them. And whether the violin was in any way responsible or not, Peter had another accomplishment which few people ever suspected—he was a finished dancer. He hadn't studied it at all. Once, in his most impressionable years, he had attended a dance after a barn-raising, and he had taken to it like a puppy to the water.

"A few times afterwards he had been invited to dancing parties in homes in the neighborhood, and while he was dancing he enjoyed them, but when that stopped he was at sea. There were the interludes to be spent in cosy corners and on stair steps, when he felt as much out of his element as a buffalo at a pony show. Small talk was an accomplishment of which he knew nothing and which held a kind of terror for him—and these very informal gatherings seemed to demand an appalling amount of it.

"Every winter Peter spent a week or two with

the cousins in town. He knew as much of city ways as any other wide-awake young man who lives on a farm within easy travelling distance, and he had the same amazing faculty for getting the most out of these flying trips. He knew just what plays were showing in the theatres—the daily papers reach neighborhoods far more obscure than Birchfield—and he knew pretty well which plays were most worth seeing. He knew when Mischa Elman would be in town and timed his visits accordingly. He knew what churches he wanted to visit—a review of the sermons was one of the treats he took home to his father and mother. And he knew that he wanted to have one night's unbroken enjoyment with the best orchestra in the best dance-hall in the city. His cousins never failed him in this. They were girls who never frequented a dance-hall on any other occasion, but Peter's enthusiasm, and his dancing were irresistible. These annual dissipations kept him in touch with the art, as it were. With the passing seasons when Fashion 'hesitated' or one-stepped or fox-trotted, Peter did it too, for one night, then came home and dropped it absolutely for the rest of the year.

"Besides his violin and his library, Peter had a very businesslike looking desk in his room. He was secretary of about every agricultural organization in the district—fairs and such like. That

which occupied more of his time, however, was a pile of hand-drawn maps of the neighborhood with a line dotted in to show where an electric power-line might come through if a sufficient number of farmers could be persuaded to co-operate toward that end. After every meeting of possible supporters he would come home and shift the line a little, somewhat as a general, hard pressed, shifts his line of defence. He used to drop into the office, worried to death about it. 'There's something wrong with Birchfield,' he would storm. 'We're too satisfied with ourselves. If something isn't done soon we won't have enough people left to care whether it goes off the map or not. The radial and power line would bring new life—people who have something left to work for, and their effort might stir up the whole place.'

"One evening this spring he drove into the town to attend a meeting of the power-line committee. He opened up the council chamber, lifted the windows to let in some clean air and waited. No one else came. No doubt he was finding the whole thing very discouraging; anyway when it was too late to expect anyone else he decided to go home, and I suppose when he was putting down the windows he caught the sound of the orchestra in the dance-hall across the street. He had heard it often enough before, of course, and had paid no more attention to it than if it had been a hand organ on the corner. This night,

with the defiance that has led disappointed men into more serious dissipations, he walked across the street in the face of whoever cared to look, and disappeared up the dirty stairs.

"The Birchfield dance-hall was really not so very bad, as such places go; the town fathers would have cleared it out if they could have found a case against it. There was nothing lax in the morals of Birchfield as a municipality. If it had any indirect, insidious influence, that, of course, was out of their province. As individuals they did what they could to discourage it. The better people wouldn't let their daughters go, nor their sons if they could help it, but of course a lot of the boys drifted in. There was nothing else to do. The hall was well patronized by the factory girls from the lower part of the town—it would be no worse for that. They were mostly good-hearted, hard-working girls; this was the best the town had to offer them in the way of a good time, and they made the most of it—only there was an over-sophisticated, imported forelady in town at the time, and it happened that most of the evening she danced with Peter.

"There is a library in Birchfield not a hundred yards from the dance-hall, but it's safe to say that ninety per cent. of the people who attended the dances didn't know what the inside of the library looked like. It's amazing how many different cliques, castes, or strata can flourish in a

small town without ever rubbing shoulders with each other; how many institutions can exist and never touch the lives of half the people! And the girl who was librarian had perhaps never spoken to the girls who worked in the factory. It wasn't her fault. Dorothy Walton is neither a snob nor a high brow; but the social customs of Birchfield were so hedged about by habits of longstanding that there was no common meeting ground for those who happened to be once cast into separate grooves. It made life rather narrow for all of them, and Miss Walton was planning to leave Birchfield.

"Driving his car into town one evening Peter overtook her on the country road and gave her a ride. She told him that she had been helping to revise the library in the school on the corner of his farm, and he wasn't interested. He says he remembered his own school days and pitied the poor little beggars who had to depend on any school library for their reading. In fact he had seen Miss Walton many times before and hadn't been at all interested in what she was doing. He supposed a librarian was a person who kept the books straight on the shelves. And she wasn't at all interested in him. She didn't know about his books at home, or his violin or the power-line. She only knew that he was a young man of good family, who was becoming notoriously popular

at the dance-hall. That was where he went when he left her.

"And all the time Peter's mother talked of 'When Peter gets married.' And Peter went on dancing with the commonest kind of a dance-hall girl. Of course his mother wouldn't have needed to worry over the possibility of his bringing home a bride of this type. If he had been ten years younger she might have been dangerous. The danger for Peter now was that he might develop into the gay old dog searching around for amusement anywhere, compromising with all the standards that had made him a man any woman might like. The Birchfield dances had not fascinated him—he had gone to them because there was nothing else to do. He was a student and a dreamer; he was also human. There had been no one to share his dreams, but he had found what seemed to be an outlet for his humanness.

"Two weeks ago an unprecedented thing happened in Birchfield—not in the village, but among the farms in the Summers' neighborhood. Some woman conceived the startling idea that the people were not getting together enough—not just for the future of the power-line, but for the good of their souls. They were also missing a great deal by not being acquainted with the people in neighboring communities. The village hadn't proved a desirable centre; so they would create a centre of their own in their own neigh-

borhood, and make it of such a character that the best people of the village would come to them. They invited the people from neighboring communities all over the township; they asked Peter to come and state the case for the power-line; and they had Miss Walton there to talk about libraries. I was at the meeting myself and when the girl got up to speak I was heartily sorry for her. It was plain that she was frightened; she was not used to talking to crowds of people older than the children who came to her story hour at the library. It seems Peter noticed this too, and set himself to help her. I suppose he began with the idea that if giving her his undivided attention would be of any use he would see her through. She saw him and it did help. The next minute she had forgotten him—she was lost in her story; she loved books with a human affection and she was carried away with them, as any lover loses himself in the thing he loves. And there sat poor old Peter, staring. I suppose he had never dreamed that anyone else, at least any girl, ever thought of things that way. When everyone else applauded, he still sat, staring. And he had lived five miles from this girl all his life, and had known her—as a librarian.

"The rest of the night's programme was a bigger surprise to Birchfield. The furniture was pushed to the walls and an old character who cuts wood for the farmers by day and fiddles for

dances at night was tuning his violin—and Peter had the shock of his young life when he saw his own stately father and his rather portly, dignified mother lead out a set at the lancers. It was largely an old-people's dance, and they laughed a lot, and panted a lot over it; but there was no doubt they enjoyed it. Afterwards they went off in little groups by themselves, and looked on pityingly at their young folks' degeneracy into fox-trotting.

"There were a lot of young people from the country around who hadn't learned to dance—the town dance hall was the only available dancing school and naturally they weren't encouraged to go there. When the farming community started a dance of its own it was inevitable that there should be a lot of boys and girls standing around the walls, watching. So the chairwoman of the evening cut into things, pushed the dancers off to one half of the floor, and had a row of benches strung across to keep them there, then made the announcement that Miss Walton would give the others a lesson on the fox-trot. I looked about for Peter just then, and found him standing against the wall, still staring. If the girl had been embarrassed on the platform she was perfectly at home here. It seems she teaches dancing to a kindergarten class at the library on Saturday afternoons. She strung her class out in a circle and spent some time drilling them

in the step of it; then, encouraging as a mother bird flying ahead, watchful as a drill sergeant, she led them swinging around the room, counting 'one and two and three and fo-ur and two-step in and two-step out,' like a professional dancing teacher. Properly or not, she had them all fox-trotting in ten minutes. Then she told them to try it together and when she went to demonstrate this Peter was there. As far as I can learn he hasn't been far away ever since.

"This happened just two weeks ago. Driving through, you don't see the effect on the neighborhood yet—but it's already visible enough in Peter. He's going after the power-line now in a way that can't fail to bring it within the next year, and the Summers won't have to sell the old homestead —a calamity that they were beginning to fear themselves. There will be many other cases that we don't hear about, and all because several communities, including a town, pooled their social interests."

"Rather heavy stuff, all this community investigation," Billy remarked as they drove away. "I started out with the idea of impressing you with the freedom and restfulness of country life, and we've found nothing but responsibility. It would seem that every socially minded person going to the country should go with the spirit of a foreign missionary."

"They'd be dreadful nuisances if they did,

though. All the worth-while things seem to have just grown out of someone's wanting other people to be happy. You don't go after it like a profession. You don't try to see the whole world at once—just your own little corner. First, your own family—you want them to be happy because you like them; then your own neighbors—you want them to be happy because you know them. It works out wonderfully in a natural little way of its own, too. When you're very happy you want everyone else to have the same things that make you happy. That's why it's the best first investment a woman can make for the world to keep the fires warm in her own house. You can't imagine a family quarrelling among themselves and wanting to take in a tramp, can you?"

"And I suppose a family self-centred is almost as bad as an individual self-centred. But next week let's let our friend judge his own plots while we do some of this linking up with city advantages which he says is so important to a broadened outlook. Let's see 'Dear Brutus.' After all this researching into the whereforeness of failures in a community we ought to be prepared for the theme. How is it it goes? 'The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars but in ourselves.' Sounds like some more sermonizing, but if it is it will be fairly subtle."

CHAPTER XIX.

"One can miss the best happiness of marriage because one travels through it in kid gloves, Pullman cars, first-class staterooms, and grand hotels. Rich, city-bred, voluntarily childless, one can mince through marriage as sight-seers promenade in a forest on a gravelled path with hand-rails, signposts, and seats. On the other hand, one may know marriage as Kipling's Mowgli knew the forest, because he travelled as well in the tree-tops as on the springy ground."—Dr. Richard Cabot, in "What Men Live By."

With "Dear Brutus" there was the usual surprised delight when the curtain rose, at the birds and sunshine in the English garden, the piquant fascination of the dwarf magician, then the unfolding of the tragedy of the failure-lives begging a second chance, and the whimsical fairy tale of the enchanted garden—the land of "Might Have Been."

Billy was accustomed to the impulsive touch of a hand on his sleeve, at the high spots in plays, not a nervous, bothersome little hand, but a warm electric contact as quickly withdrawn while the girl kept her eyes fast on the stage. Sometimes he lost the effect of half the best acting in his amusement at watching her, like a child actually living for the moment in the drama going on before her. He was accustomed also to the tears that welled up at emotional parts, tears usually

with a smile shining through them. But he was not prepared for the deluge that swept her when the impenetrable darkness came down over the enchanted garden and the little dream daughter, who might have set things right for the misunderstood artist, cried in the hopelessness of a child's terrified loneliness "I don't want to be a 'Might Have Been.' "

He had seen her weep in poetic enjoyment of pathetic parts before, but this was different and offered no explanation for itself. Sitting as close as the arm of the chair and the formality due in a public place would allow, he got the impact of each fresh shock. He was genuinely concerned. It was a most helpless situation. There were ways of meeting it, of course, which he knew—but not in a public theatre. . . . If only the lights would go out! Still it troubled him a little. And when it was over her sole comment was "Wasn't it wonderful!"

"You liked it!"

"It was the most beautiful thing—"

"Even the garden? Just what was the trouble?"

"I hardly know myself. Sometime I'll try to tell you."

There would always be something left to tell—a new world dawning every morning, new mysteries unfolding every evening—a wonderful blessing on a long journey together.

When he left her he stood bareheaded, boyish in his humility, and spoke, as thousands of lovers had done before him, of the time when she would go all the way home with him.

. . . . . .

It came in October. The painters had fairly crowded the carpenters out of the house, and before the last varnish was dry on the woodwork Billy had cleared away the wreckage of mortar, boxes and discarded scaffolds and left the house standing trim and solid between the sentinel pines, unmistakably new, but looking as though it had grown there. The next day Ruth's aunt, accompanied by a capable charwoman and a truck load of boxes, known in the housewife's vernacular as chests, decorously chaperoned her niece to her future home to arrange furniture and hang curtains and give the last touches toward making it sufficiently habitable to begin with. The aunt wasn't just sure that it was the proper thing for a girl to visit her fiancee's house before she was married. She didn't know that Ruth had rope-walked the naked joists in the moonlight with Billy many times while the building was in progress; that they had measured the windows for curtains by the gleam of a flashlight a month before, else how could they have planned every last chair and hanging. The next night they came home to the house together.

The girl had protested at the idea of a wed-

ding trip. "We both like that hill farm better than anywhere else in the world," she said. "Why should we go racing off to some place we don't care about?"

"And defy an old custom like that?" he argued; but he knew that she knew how much he had wanted exactly that.

So they had gone to the church in the afternoon and had come back to a reception at the aunt's afterwards—a very nice affair with the luxurious old rooms candle-lighted and hung with autumn leaves. And their best friends had come to wish them well, with all the noise and chatter common to such occasions, even among very well bred people; and as soon as they could, they kissed the aunt and slipped away, getting a last glimpse of Jean and the Agricultural Representative, apparently completely lost in some panorama unfolding itself before them in the open fire.

The car swung out of the city streets on to the smooth, winding country road, a familiar road, but somehow different. At the crest of the hill they stopped and looked back at the city glittering in a cup below them.

"Sure you're not sorry you're leaving it?" Billy asked.

"Quite sure. But it isn't the city's fault. It isn't a natural place to live; but it has a lot to give in other ways."

"Things we must try to keep in touch with."

"Only there are times when neither city nor country, nor anything else, matters. It's only people that count—"

But Billy was very appreciative and that sentence was never quite finished.

. . . . . .

They were miles from the lights of the city now. A long stretch of road through woods and pastures, a white frost glittering on the fields and fences, a golden moonlight filtering through the branches of wind-swept trees and yellowing the dead leaves on the moist, black roadway, a cold white mist lying in the valley and never a sound but the steady purring of the engine. Presently a little cabin stood out alone in a clearing, its lights out, a faint white plume of smoke arising slowly from its chimney.

"Always seems a sort of lonely little house," Billy remarked. "It must be a jolt to come out of the heart of a city to a spot like this. The compensation, of course, is that people have to love each other harder—sometimes there isn't much else. When they don't, the result is terrible."

It was late when they turned in at their own gate. Earlier in the evening a neighbor had come in and lighted the fire and gone away again; the red light glowed warmly in the living-room windows. They went in together. It was the same room where they had hung curtains and adjusted furniture the day before, the same room Billy

had looked back upon happily before he left the house that afternoon, but it seemed to have come alive, somehow. The firelight played over the brown walls, the rich red and brown and gold bindings of the books, the warm autumn tints in the curtains. . . . A new, strange shyness held them. She slipped out of her coat and he took it from her with his best drawing-room adeptness; she waited while he found a place for it. Then they turned their attention to the fire—there was always something that might be done to a fire.

But standing there in the fresh warmth of the blazing logs, with Billy's eyes upon her, serious and friendly, she realized suddenly how appealingly boyish he was in his anxiety to make her feel at home. And just as suddenly it dawned on Billy that she was, after all, just a wisp of a girl, such a rare, whimsical, comrady bit of a girl, who had staked everything so sportingly to come with him. And his arm went about her with the quick, reassuring pressure of a guide to be trusted.

"We're going to be awfully happy here," he said, just as though he hadn't said it a thousand times before.

And the girl pressed closer to the good, rough sleeve of his coat and let it go at that.

The lights went out in the little house. The smoke still rose from the chimney like incense from an altar. Somewhere in the distance an owl

hooted, a far off lonely cry—one of the calls of the wild places which seldom fails to stir the human soul with kindred desolation, or a throb of security in the nearness of its mate. And the old pines dozed in dreamy retrospection. They had watched other lovers come and go. They were at the happy beginning of a new story.